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Y. SOGOMONOV, P. LANDESMAM

# Nihilism Today



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Ю. СОГОМОНОВ, П. ЛАНДЕСМАН  
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## INTRODUCTION

It would be a waste of effort to consider and analyse nihilism had it been a fixture solely of misanthropes, of eccentric people preaching that the world was coming to an end or of simply misfits in need of ordinary compassion, if not psychotherapy. But with the general crisis of capitalism, with the old society inevitably moving towards its last gasp, there is incontrovertible evidence of the widespread existence of nihilistic and pessimistic beliefs that have been a hallmark of the spiritual atmosphere in the bourgeois world.

Distilled nihilism and pessimism (in the spirit of orthodox Schopenhauerism) would, of course, look old-fashioned today. Nonetheless, the ideas covertly propounding nihilism and pessimism are dissolved in many present-day bourgeois philosophical doctrines, social conceptions and futurological theories. Countless attempts have been made to prove that history is as blind as a mole, that truth is no more than a conventionality, a transient compromise, that human vices are ineradicable and all revolutionary programmes and actions are doomed, that man's existence is chimerical, and so on and so forth.

Conclusions of this sort are accepted not merely by the architects of these theories or a small group of fervent admirers. By devious means they migrate into the mass consciousness of the bourgeois world, linking up with the consonant albeit spontaneously shaped ideas and feelings of a certain segment of ordinary people. As a consequence, due to the momentous, fundamental historical changes and

the enormous growth of the consciousness and activity of the masses, nihilism is becoming a menace to society.

Nihilism may be analysed by an internal and external critique of various systematised theories containing nihilistic views. Here the analysis would cover the substance of the criticised theories and their cognitive and social roots, and its purpose would be to show their untenability. We see our task in something quite different—in bringing to light nihilism's designation and place in the modern battle of ideas. We therefore had to lay bare why and how nihilistic views and feelings have become a factor of the bourgeois mass consciousness, to show how this factor, sometimes called the sense of wretchedness (a term widely used by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Mind*), took shape and functions, and also the social context of its mythology. On top of everything, it was necessary to go into the actual meaning of this conception, which the bourgeois theorists have tried hard to obscure.

Since we have placed the accent on an examination of how nihilistic ideas undergo modifications and operate on the level of the bourgeois mass consciousness, on their evolution on this level, we do not mention the names, schools and orientations that would have had to be given in an academic analysis of the theoretical genealogy of nihilism and pessimism. We have reduced the number of quotations, literary footnotes, statistical and other data to a minimum. The circumstance that we have had to note or somehow touch upon many aspects of modern social and spiritual life compelled us to draw upon the most diverse sources (documents, articles in the press, philosophical, ethical, sociological and socio-psychological studies, works of art). With the exception of cases where this was required by gratitude, we did not refer the reader to the host of books and papers, on whose basis this book was conceived. This method of exposition, which did not require us to dwell on minutiae, enabled us to concentrate on a general outline of the dynamics of the bourgeois mass consciousness.

Lastly, a few words on the compositional character of this book, which sprang from the following considerations. The notion that nihilism died away long ago has some foundation and is based on the fact that overlying the sense

of wretchedness are views and feelings that may be regarded as optimistic and which are usually designated as a sense of contentedness. The impression that this sense of contentedness predominates is what creates the illusion that pessimistic views and emotions are peripheral. But the contented consciousness is no more than false optimism. The sense of contentedness and wretchedness complement rather than exclude each other.

A parallel examination of these forms of bourgeois mass consciousness makes it possible to review its political and moral conflicts and prescribed stereotype behaviour patterns. It opens the way to comprehending the mutations of the bourgeois consciousness, its movement from contentedness to wretchedness, and helps to give a better understanding of the revolutionary character of the dialectical materialistic world outlook, which is the foundation of historical optimism.

## CHAPTER ONE

### SENSE OF CONTENTEDNESS

*For I have sworn thee fair,  
and thought thee bright,  
Who art as black as hell,  
as dark as night.*

SHAKESPEARE

#### PURPOSE

The period when a mode of production is in the ascendant the majority of the population invariably looks forward with hope. The course of social development is regarded not only as natural but sometimes also as the sole possible course of events. "So long as a mode of production still describes an ascending curve of development, it is enthusiastically welcomed even by those who *come off worst* from its corresponding mode of distribution."\*

But sooner or later difficulties overcome a class-antagonistic mode of production, and it begins to move towards a decline. What only recently seemed to be quite durable dissolves like smoke mainly, needless to say, among those "*who come off worst*". Disappointment and discontent mount. The system of values that had regulated people's behaviour for centuries totters. Traditional notions about what is good and just, kind and beautiful are questioned and often labelled as prejudices, as delusions of the epoch.

Disaffection and indignation become the norm. Wavering and grumbling gradually embrace even the ruling classes. Their ideology and culture begin to crumble. Scepticism and cynicism spread ever wider. Long-standing social links are severed. And on that soil there emerge philosophical schools preaching loneliness, the senselessness of existence, nihilism and pessimism.

One cannot attribute this change in the public mood of an antagonistic society to the fact that always, even in the best of times, there are people who are disaffected over

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\* F. Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Moscow, 1975, p. 172 (authors' italics).

something, have lost their belief in something, and regard themselves as having been passed over by destiny. Similarly, it cannot be argued that this change is due to the fact that in every epoch of exploiting society disaffection arises out of an unfavourable concurrence of circumstances, out of specific dramatic situations (a lost war, protracted economic difficulties, natural calamities, the suppression of one social movement or another), and so forth. This cannot be done because it is a matter of a universal, far-reaching change in a class-antagonistic society. This change can only be seen as the outcome of a basic conflict between the needs of the masses, the radically enlarged possibilities of satisfying these needs and the socio-economic and political relations that hinder the realisation of these possibilities. Continued mass disaffection exists only in epochs of the general crises of antagonistic social systems.

To the largest extent this concerns the general crisis of modern capitalism. It is only the superficial observer who may get the impression that a general crisis breaks out unexpectedly and spontaneously. Actually such a crisis is always preceded by the gradual appearance of definite indications of stagnation and decline.

The disaffection and indignation of the masses become extremely dangerous to outworn social relations, coming forward as the foundation of social changes. That is when all of bourgeois society's forces interested in preserving the old order take urgent measures: parallel with greater repressions, control of the behaviour of people and a policy of concessions and handouts, they bring ideological and psychological pressures to bear. All means are used to foster a sense of contentedness that reconciles the masses to the existent bourgeois order.

Efforts are made to separate the notions of the man in the street about his social condition from his actual status, to distort these notions so that the people regard as their own the interests and aspirations of the social forces determined to sustain and repair the shaken foundations of capitalism.

The crisis of the bourgeois system remains a grim reality. The attempts to regulate the economy and other spheres of the life of society under state-monopoly capitalism have

not resolved its basic problems. On the contrary, they have intensified crisis phenomena, aggravating the antagonisms implicit in that system. However, a way of life harmonising as naturally as possible with reality is imposed upon the man in the street so that actual troubles are regarded as imaginary, while seeming troubles as real. The morals of capitalist society, which elevate vice to a standard of behaviour, thus become decent and even respectable. Indoctrinated in this fashion, man remains satisfied with his life, while rebellious motives, criticism of a mad world and outbursts of popular anger are received by him with suspicion and hostility as inconsonant with common sense, as a disturbance of harmony and tranquillity. The need for mass-producing the sense of contentedness grows tremendously in the epoch of the general crisis of capitalism, in the period of qualitative changes at the third stage of that crisis. The dilemma is—either perish or bourgeoisify the masses.

Let us see what the embourgeoisement of the masses means. It does not mean the atomisation of property and its redistribution, or the conversion of the entire able-bodied population into proprietors. It means moulding individuals united socially and psychologically, i.e., by ideals and views (outwardly non-bourgeois and even anti-bourgeois), by the entire gamut of feelings and desires conforming to the expectations of small entrepreneurs. By their actual social condition they would objectively remain wage workers, whose exploitation would continue bringing the capitalist surplus value, but their consciousness would be petty-bourgeois—it would be the consciousness of satisfied and contented people. Such consumer-oriented individuals would easily fit into the state-monopoly system, into the modern bourgeois organisation, merging with the petty-bourgeois mass. Such individuals would be lost to the revolution.

### MECHANISM OF MOULDING

The ruling class has been made to realise by its theorists that the choice of either perishing or bourgeoisifying the masses is inevitable. These theorists insist that the further



course of events depends entirely on how seriously the ruling class treats the dilemma, on the foresight and energy of the industrial, political and military élite. Capitalism, they maintain, has a chance that must not be allowed to slip away. There is, allegedly, nothing objectively inescapable in history. Its course can be directed. What is needed most is determination. Social development, they tell us, will now not follow the course set by Marx.

The capitalist ruling class of the second half of the 20th century is endeavouring to create the material basis of the sense of contentedness, relying on the achievements of science and technology, the unprecedented growth of labour productivity, the modifications in the class structure, state regulation and the bureaucratic machine of administration and suppression.

The certain rise of the living standard of part of the working people in the capitalist countries has two antipodal sources: concessions wrung in the course of class battles and "gifts" made preventively. The former are vital for the masses, giving them a more worthy life (as far as that is at all possible under conditions of oppression). By enhancing the working people's political consciousness, activity, organisation and morals, they serve as the guarantee of staunchness and victory in the future battles against capitalism.

The latter, on the other hand, are the result of operation of many factors. Some we have already mentioned: the rapid growth of labour productivity springing from scientific and technological progress, from the rationalisation of production. A certain effect has been yielded by state regulation of production and exchange and by supra-national integration. Also, mention must be made of the higher degree of labour intensification and the numerical growth of the stratum of skilled workers receiving a relatively higher wage. Among the mass of wage workers there is now a fairly large segment of relatively well-paid white-collar workers. Crumbs have fallen also into the lap of unskilled factory and office workers. This is no longer simply bribery of the élite, no longer solely the allocation of part of the super-profits to the workers' aristocracy as had formerly been the case (although this system operates

to this day). In other words, it is not a matter of the policy of big business but of socio-economic changes.

At the same time, these handouts are an indication of mercenary class calculation, of a flexible reaction to the attractiveness of socialism's achievements. Their purpose is to create a semblance of capitalism's stability, to restore the much-shaken faith in the capitalist social system, in its "universal possibilities", one of which is to work an "economic miracle". But this requires special measures, among which is the practice of human relations covering a series of steps designed, allegedly, to improve the working conditions of the labour force. This forced (and profitable) cycle of practical steps is depicted by the capitalists in the most attractive light as an essential share of "gifts given voluntarily".

In practice, however, the purpose of these human relations is to facilitate the growth of labour productivity and encourage the workers to take a larger interest in production. This practice envisages heightened attention to the problem of labour monotony and boredom, industrial aesthetics and safety measures, the professional and cultural training of workers, and an analysis of their capabilities and demands. It calls for the formation of small groups in production by harmonising characters, by the elevation of moods and the organisation of leisure time. It requires an improvement of "industrial democracy", i.e., of the methods of management, the establishment of personal contacts, a dialogue between the managerial staff and the workers, and economic information (which, as a matter of fact, is reduced to reports on the new demands in the world market and to complaints against the pressure of state taxes) to the workers.

Human relations are called forth by the profound changes in the content of industrial labour and the professional structure of the working class. Even at its early stage automation has shown that production objectively requires workers to display the maximum attention and a high sense of responsibility. An ingenious system of incentives and pay rises is obviously inadequate for purchasing the desired spirit of co-operation and responsibility, for the simple reason that commodities of this sort are general-

ly neither sold nor bought. The conflict between the basic interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is the insuperable barrier between the objective need for co-operation and the actual motivations inducing factory and office workers to work.

In order to create the impression that the interests of workers, the management and proprietors are integrating, and secure the bluebird of workers' loyalty to capitalist production it was necessary to go beyond the technical aspects of the division of labour and the manipulations forced upon workers. The growth of the percentage of mental labour in production and the diminution of the percentage of direct physical effort, as a consequence of the scientific and technological revolution, make external control of the actions of factory and office workers less and less effective. Another point that must be borne in mind is that today the struggle of the proletariat is not confined to purely material demands, that this struggle is putting forward many social demands that are widening the arena of class collisions.

The handouts we have mentioned are used by the bourgeoisie as material for demagoguery, for the ideological manipulation of the working people. Shameless flattery of the underdog and bombastic self-advertisement are directed into the channel of the struggle against the class self-awareness and organisations of factory and office workers in the calculation that the politically immature segment of the working people will swallow the sugar-coated fable of the capitalist monopolies having a fatherly interest in their loyal employees.

Further, the ruling class is pinning its hopes on political liberalism, which extols bourgeois democracy as the highest aim of the political activity of the working people. The corresponding mystification creates the illusion that democracy prevails in the capitalist world. The main contradiction of the epoch is depicted as a conflict between democracy and totalitarianism. The state interlocked with the monopolies is portrayed as having a dazzling nimbus around it, as the principal factor of general well-being, the guarantor of harmony between all classes and social groups and the custodian of the interests of the man in the street.

The existence of a voluntarily given prize to the slave makes all consequences of a higher living standard extremely contradictory and complicated, and engenders a sense of contentedness, creating the possibility of forming multitudes of isolated individuals preoccupied solely with consumer cares. These multitudes are passive, apathetic and unprincipled, but this does not disturb the mind of those who form them. The main purpose has been achieved—the accumulation of a genuinely revolutionary potential has been halted.

The need for this mass production of ideals of contentedness has never been felt so acutely and understood so clearly by the ruling class as in our epoch of the growth of the subjective factor, of the social will in history. The belief that this aim is attainable and the certain advances that have been made towards it must be attributed to the reasons why in a period of an irreparable crisis of its social organisation the ruling class itself has become infused with the hope of salvation and, consequently, a sense of contentedness. In the given case this is not merely the result of its predominance, but of its belief that it can maintain this domination for quite a long time.

The sense of contentedness recruits votaries from all social groups—white-collar workers and businessmen, the philistines in urban enclaves and luxury suburbs, owners of service stations and scientists. The picture is complicated by the kaleidoscopic character of ideological and psychological indicators: to the superficial observer it seems that the sense of contentedness is shared by all, irrespective of party affiliations, political sympathies, philosophical notions, artistic predilections, a moral level, and so forth.

But views of this sort, which obscure the actual situation, are quickly dispelled by a comprehensive analysis. Although the possessors of the sense of contentedness do not wear an identification flower in their buttonhole, their social affiliation, convictions and morals are by no means indifferent factors of their choice. The sense of contentedness is indisputably implicit in those who belong to the big financial, industrial and commercial bourgeoisie. If there are exceptions, they are casual in the group as a whole. But the secret of the sense of contentedness is that

bourgeois ideas are forced upon the non-bourgeois masses, upon the strata that if only by virtue of their social condition are interested in putting an end to imperialist bourgeois rule and creating a united front of struggle against it. The purpose of the sense of contentedness is precisely to remove or at least mitigate this threat of the unity of the people. To see how this works let us consider other social groups.

The sense of contentedness is acquired most easily by people belonging to strata on the fringe of the main social classes and comprising the so-called middle, intermediate class. Its most massive and staunch proponents are the various segments of the petty bourgeoisie called the lumpen-bourgeoisie by the American sociologist C. W. Mills.\* This is due to their social status, which needs to be fed with illusions.

But in the industrialised capitalist countries the social composition of the middle class has undergone essential changes during the past decades as a result of the numerical growth of white-collar workers and intellectuals. These quickly growing social groups are relatively weakly immune to petty-bourgeois ideology, to its behaviour patterns and preferences. By virtue of the specifics of their social status and features of their vital activity it is not easy for them to free themselves of the economic and spiritual pressures of the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie. It is not simple to win them over to socialist ideology. The sense of contentedness finds adherents among white-collar workers and intellectuals with relative ease, chiefly among the top echelon, which has become part of the ruling élite. The degree of resistance to the standards of the sense of contentedness differs among the scientific, technical, artistic, educational, medical and managerial intelligentsia. The same may be said of the future intelligentsia, of the students.

The sense of contentedness is to be observed to a far lesser degree among industrial workers. But there is no complete coincidence between the objective condition of the workers

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\* See C. Wright Mills, *White Collar. The American Middle Classes*, New York, 1956, pp. 28-33.

as the most revolutionary class of present-day society and every worker's subjective awareness of the working class's historical mission in each given period. Due to the operation of concrete, historical reasons the conversion of a "class in itself" into a "class for itself" may be a drawn-out process. Some segments of the working class may remain susceptible, even for a long time, to the psychology of the capitalist world, from which they are not protected by impenetrable barriers. They are ravaged by ideological and psychological infection and remain captive to old habits. The old always has as its allies the force of the concrete, the force of numbers, the force of inertia and the force of habit. The ability to counter the concrete, mass sense of contentedness depends on the social condition of the different segments of the working class, on the level of their organisation and class-consciousness. The force of these factors differs among workers of large industrial centres and among workers employed at small enterprises and in agriculture, among workers in productive and non-productive industries (trade, services, and so on), among the workers' aristocracy, technicians and specialised workers, and so forth.

The number of people disoriented by the ideology of the sense of contentedness is huge in countries or regions where, for various reasons, the democratic and socialist movement is less developed, where Communist and workers' parties have to operate underground, where reformism is widespread and the masses have relatively little political experience.

As we have already noted, the sense of contentedness arises out of the objective processes of social reality. However, the different impulses come not solely from that reality, for it is diverse, but also from each of its "pieces". The sense of contentedness does not take shape spontaneously. There are class forces—they, too, are an element of the life of society—that are directly interested in "helping" reality to influence the individual in such a way as to give him that sense. Therefore, one can and must speak also of the ill will of a definite group of people.

Contemporary state-monopoly capitalism purposefully indoctrinates the masses in the spirit of the sense of con-

tentedness on an organisational scale that is both unprecedented and inconceivable in the past. The machine called upon to effect mass ideological suggestion consists of a host of units, each of which contributes to the attainment of the set aim. Despite the outward impression of being swamped with their own work (management of production, organisation of marketing, the provision of services on the scale of a country or corporation, the supervision of legality, the imparting of knowledge, and so on), production, consumer and military organisations, politico-judicial and administrative institutions and educational systems uninterruptedly participate in exercising ideological pressure, which is sustained by the maintenance of a definite public opinion and the placement of personnel, and manifested in an ideological undertone of technical and economic decisions, in streamlined methods of encouragement and penalties, in the selection of needed spiritual and volitional qualities in people, in the imposition of desirable responses to events, in behaviour patterns and in assessment scales. On this point Lenin wrote that "nothing can be done without the masses. And in this era of printing and parliamentarism it is *impossible* to gain the following of the masses without a widely ramified, systematically managed, well-equipped system of flattery, lies, fraud, juggling with fashionable and popular catchwords, and promising all manner of reforms and blessings to the workers right and left—as long as they renounce the revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie."\* In one way or another all elements of the superstructure, all the components of the social organisation take part in controlling the behaviour of people.

Let us now examine the organ specialising in ideological and psychological indoctrination—the ramified and all-embracing system of mass propaganda media. The strength of this system of social suggestion is exemplified best of all by the organisation of mass chauvinistic, racist, fascist, anti-Soviet and other hysteria. Also, evidence of this strength is given by quantitative indicators: the average American is involved in the system of mass media, i.e., he

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 23, p. 117.

listens to the radio, sees films and TV programmes, and reads newspapers and magazines, spending as much time on this as on his work. All the branches on the conveyor of show business are called the super-light industry by the French sociologist Edgar Morin. In only the USA this system employs more than a million people, and its budget runs into several billion dollars annually.

The content of the information given by this system is well known. Even the majority of bourgeois sociologists acknowledge that information is selected, juggled, touched up and frequently, much too frequently, falsified in order to brainwash people and attune their emotions in favour of undisguised or covert anti-communism, in favour of an eye-catching presentation of the ideas and way of life of the "free world". The aim of ideologically mesmerising people is served by social and political demagoguery, the eulogisation of bourgeois-democratic institutions, religious preaching, nationalistic stock phrases, "warm" moralisation and sex bombs, the stimulation of consumer cults and the creation of show idols.

A high level of professionalism in the presentation and interpretation of information, and a differentiated approach to each social stratum are demanded of the system operating in an atmosphere of brutal competition. High standards are required in flexibility and in adaptability to the fashion, to the vacillations of moods, to changes in the psychology of the man in the street. Language, style and intonation are adjusted to the level understood by the consumer. All the achievements of technical thought in the sphere of communications are utilised quickly.

Logical argumentation is conspicuously absent in the ideological torrent deluging the man in the street. Small wonder that the system of mass media is called a machine of indoctrination, not of persuasion. Clearly predominant in it is the trend towards irrationalism, towards rubber-stamp decisions of problems, towards appealing to prejudices and base instincts barely covered with the fig-leaf of reason.

This lack of scruples is justified with references to certain qualities of the man in the street, to his allegedly innate primitiveness and bigotry, indolence and irrespon-



sibility, slow-wittedness and incompetence, the corrosion of his artistic taste. It is asserted that his thinking is biased, that he is astonishingly willing to accept the most dubious analogies and that he invariably gives his sympathies to varnish rather than the essence of the matter, that he is inclined towards frivolity and camaraderie (the impression that an anonymous communication is addressed to the given person). It is recommended that this should be taken into consideration.

The following, in general outline, is how the mechanism of suggestion operates. At first the individual being brainwashed by bourgeois propaganda is weaned away from independent thinking, by various manipulations the resistance of his consciousness is suppressed—*mundus vult decipi, ergo decipiator*—and then this circumstance is used to justify the “forced” lowering of the standard of the mass media to the level of the dulled consumer. In the beginning standard thinking and unco-ordinated wishes are forced upon the people, stunning and demoralising them, and then the people are accused of drabness and indifference, sentimentality and blood-thirstiness, bias for labels, stereotype, mob thinking, etc.

In the planning centres of the ideological battle waged by the modern bourgeoisie, they are afraid of intelligence because capitalist reality no longer has intelligent foundations. There can be no question of having the true interests of the people explained to them, as was once insisted upon by bourgeois enlighteners, who laid bare (even though they were unable to explain it) the paradoxical contradiction between the potentialities of an autonomous mind and the prevailing consciousness of the people. On the contrary, the ruling class is out to obscure the true interests of the masses, to obliterate any notion of these interests from their minds. The semblance of explanation that is given appeals to brute instincts and excites hysteria. Artificial requirements are foisted on the man in the street and the corresponding thoughts and feelings are cultivated in him. When the mind is blurred and man sleeps with his eyes open or is in a state of shock, it is easier to enforce suggestions cramming the people's minds with specially selected ideas, and subjecting them to external control. After

this sort of bourgeois manipulation the individual is ready for dogmatic repetitions of political prejudices and pseudo-moral incantations in accordance with the ideological catch-words imprinted in his mind. The aim has now been achieved and every conceivable imprecation may be called down on the hopelessly "dull-witted mob".

In the bourgeois world most of the mass media serially reproducing the sense of contentedness are not free from ideological and commercial interests. These media set the standards for and uphold the bourgeois way of thinking and behaviour. They perform the function of moulding in the masses a general motivation and offering them ways of adaptation. But society abounds in different motivations and modes of adaptation. Which are regarded as basic? Unquestionably the ideas (and also aims, motivations, standards, and so on) of the ruling class, the bourgeoisie. This means that the system of mass communication strives to make bourgeois ideas, value inducements and standards general and even mandatory.

The guideline is that people's behaviour depends entirely on how they interpret a definite situation. In philosophical language this is nothing less than an idealistic understanding of history, a return to the maxim that "opinions rule the world", according to which socio-psychological phenomena are interpreted from the standpoint of social psychology. In other words, the world is ruled by the architects of opinion, by those who direct traditions, have command of the ideological kitchen and are able to give feelings and emotions a preset orientation. It is argued that however acute and irreconcilable the contradictions of capitalism may seem to be, they can be resolved amicably with a certain effort at deforming the mentality of the man in the street, by inducing him to accept the ideals, expectations and values of the ruling class. If the sense of contentedness becomes general or is instilled into the vast majority of people in such a manner as to make voluntary slavery intangible, and rule out resistance and protests (or direct the latter into a relatively harmless channel) the course of events will allegedly remain under control of the opinion-makers.

To the superficial observer it seems that by ideological

manipulation it is indeed possible to programme behaviour, attitudes and the entire range of emotions, and divert public attention to forms of activity (work, entertainment, insipid criticism) that can do the bourgeois organisation no harm. Once this is achieved the greatest of tragedies are drowned in the general noise; functioning in a preset orientation, information will fill the vacuum of routine with compensating illusions, muffling protests, orientating people on consumer symbols and encouraging irresponsibility: strictly dosed social criticism will be directed against individuals (whipping boys) and against definite actions of certain institutions. Meanwhile, the system as a whole will escape real criticism and thereby retain its attractiveness and moral "sanctity".

People subjected to bourgeois ideological manipulation discuss with more eagerness than ever whether the star of the serial hit film of the season will marry, whether the detective in a TV film will solve his case, who the next boxing champion will be, or what the next year's auto show will look like rather than the arms race, the strike struggle or political debates. And if the consumer of bourgeois information turns to problems of the day, his judgment will be based on the bourgeois ideological recipes given him long in advance and which will seem to him to be an expression of his own thinking, of his own interests, which are in some miraculous way consonant with the good of society. In the long run people behave on the basis of their judgments.

Such is the typical anti-utopia, which bourgeois propaganda does not stint effort and means in its attempts to translate into reality. These attempts give rise even to eccentric theories (for instance, the theory propounded by the Canadian culturologist Marshall McLuhan), according to which the technical means of mass communication are the basic factor of historical development.

But these calculations, as we have noted earlier, rest on an idealistic understanding of history, once more showing how and why the ruling class necessarily arrives at this perception of the world: this and nothing else allows it to justify and uphold its aims, and in the epoch of decline to keep alive the hope that it will remain invul-

nerable. Historical idealism is thus a means not only of deceit but also of self-deceit.

However, relative success in the manipulation of mass opinion and behaviour cannot endlessly bring the bourgeois dividends. The drugging of the people's consciousness inevitably comes into collision with the people's ultimate awareness of their basic and not only of their momentary interests.

### CONSUMER IDEOLOGY

The sense of contentedness is the expression of the sum of expectations and ideals frequently called consumer ideology.\*

The proponents of this ideology believe that in the 20th century the individual in the industrialised capitalist countries has finally received the long-awaited possibility of living entirely for himself. For that reason hedonism has become his ideal in life.

Hegel had called hedonism a Faustian consciousness thirsting for happiness, striving to bask in it but never creating it. Hedonism—both vulgar, simplified, dictated by unchecked passions, and “cultured”, modern, aestheticised and condemning dissoluteness—identifies the good with the enjoyable. As seen by this doctrine, all people can only act out of a desire for gratification (psychological self-explanation) and must act desiring gratification (ethical self-assertion).

Under this frame of mind the motivations and purpose of life, even in each of its periods and forms of manifestation, are reduced by hedonism to the receipt of maximum enjoyment and to a minimum of suffering. What, by this logic, brings pleasure is of no import. The important thing is its duration (quantitative aspect) and intensity (qualitative aspect). The problem of the choice of the ideal in

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\* This, needless to say, implies social parasitism and not the efforts that have to be made by the disinherited segment of the population of even rich capitalist countries to keep alive. As we shall see later, relative to this, rather significant segment it would be absurd even to ask what the problem of consumption means to it.

life is in this case considered anew, but only from the standpoint of the efficacy of results, of the distribution of priorities in the range of desires, in the computation of the pros and cons of short- and long-term balance forecasts. Within the limits of this doctrine even the "nose had to have some interest before it would decide to smell anything".\*

The hedonistic ideal is only outwardly simple: the difficulty of achieving it lies not only in the constant clash with the interests of other persons acting in the same manner and pursuing analogous aims, but in the basic impossibility of exactly distributing desire priorities on the grounds of an extremely unreliable calculation, of a forecast. However, our purpose is not to dispel the doubts of the hedonist (*homo ludens*) trying to force his way through the thicket of contradictions between his own aspirations.

Let us try to review the social effects of hedonistic practices. The first point that arises is: the hedonistic ideal and its practices have a long history, while as a phenomenon of mass consciousness consumer ideology is relatively new. Are they comparable?

Indeed, the ideal and practices of hedonism appeared and spread in early class society. In their long history one can, incidentally, find some grounds for a word of praise. On the cognitive level the hedonistic principle allowed identifying the actual dependence between people's requirements, between their interests, and their social aims and moral tenets. It was indisputably this same principle that was behind the progressive idea that enjoyment was morally licensed, and behind the criticism of religious, mystical asceticism. On the ideological level hedonism was one of the first theories in which, albeit curtailed, the aspirations of the people were articulated.

Still, hedonism was an expression of, first and foremost, the ideal and practices of the exploiting classes, an expression of their class, group and individual egoism. Hedonistic practices quite obviously required definite social privileges. Any attempt to make them universal accentuated the

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\* Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. *The German Ideology*, Moscow, 1976, p. 229.

question of providing the masses with the means of enjoyment and of developing their capacity for enjoyment. The hedonistic appeal underwent metamorphoses that ended with the masses being taught to accept sterile morals calling upon them to submit to actual suffering for the sake of an expected blessing. "The philosophy of enjoyment was never anything but the clever language of certain social circles who had the privilege of enjoyment. Apart from the fact that the manner and content of their enjoyment was always determined by the whole structure of the rest of society and suffered from all its contradictions, this philosophy became a mere *phrase* as soon as it began to lay claim to a universal character and proclaimed itself the outlook on life of society as a whole. It sank then to the level of edifying moralising, to a sophistical palliation of existing society, or it was transformed into its opposite, by declaring compulsory asceticism to be enjoyment."\*

Contemporary capitalism introduced some amendments into the mode and content of enjoyment. In order to understand these modifications it is necessary to take a closer look at the following elements.

As we have noted, in the capitalist countries the living standard of many working people (blue- and white-collar workers, and working intellectuals) has risen compared with the past century. This growth is the direct result of the persevering class struggle on an international and a national scale and also an indirect result of this struggle—the concessions which the ruling class made "voluntarily". Hedonistic ideals and practices ultimately led to the evolution of some material means of enjoyment and, by virtue of the general cultural growth, some means of promoting

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\* Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 441. Even the finest proponents of the hedonistic doctrine frequently regarded compulsory asceticism as refined enjoyment. It was not accidental that the epicurean doctrine of happiness was sometimes called "materialistic asceticism". In some of his later works Paul Holbach accentuated self-improvement that was supposedly capable of compensating for the obvious dearth of means of happiness. Holbach wrote of "family happiness" and backed Adam Smith's idea that happiness was evenly distributed between the rich and the poor, losing sight of the fact that, as Engels pointed out, ideal rights were quite inadequate nourishment for the aspiration for happiness.

the capability for enjoyment. The hedonistic principle, which claims to understand society as a whole, is no longer threatened, in any case directly, with conversion into a moralising ascetic preaching.

However, this is only an empirical impression of the situation. A Marxist analysis shows that for the working people the question of the means of a worthy existence, as far as that is possible under conditions of capitalist exploitation, remains more acute than the question of the means of enjoyment, to say nothing of the fact that their vital interests require the abolition of the system of exploitation and coercion.

Bourgeois reality gives daily reminders of this, especially if it is remembered that the rise of the living standard has been accompanied by a growth of the cost of the reproduction of labour power. On account of the complication of life and the mounting nervous stress and monotony of labour to a level incomparably higher than, say, 100 or even 50 years ago, it is vital to improve the structure of nourishment, at least partially to satisfy the radically increased requirement for recreation, and provide needed education, albeit in curtailed form. Under capitalism the technical modernisation of industry has imposed an oppressive rhythm of work that leads to increased fatigue among working people of almost all categories. As a result, an ever larger proportion of the time free from work is consumed for the simple restoration of vital strength and not for self-development. In no way contributing to the individual's development, the time spent to restore the capacity for work performs what is essentially a service function relative to capitalist production.

At the same time, ever higher demands are made of the blue- and white-collar worker with regard to his development and to himself as an individual. In order to have a more or less well-paid job it is necessary to be equal to the standards that society and production set in the way of the individual's qualities. It is growing increasingly harder "to be a contemporary". One has to spend more and more time to at least sustain one's capacity for work. How must one act? What is more frightening, what must one be more apprehensive of—the Scylla of the loss of strength or

the Charybdis of the incompatibility with social and professional standards? The choice seems to be quite voluntary. But freedom of this kind is purely formal: it is a choice between two equal evils. Only the superficial observer will believe that all people are getting more and more free time which they can at will use for enjoyment or for the development of their capacity for it. What we actually observe is an exhausting struggle for each free minute.

A rising living standard is an indispensable but not the sole condition for the spread of the hedonistic ideal and practice. Let us ask the question: Is not man's vital activity the main source of and capacity for enjoyment? If in its highest forms, accessible exclusively to man, enjoyment is drawn in the process of people's activity and is the product of the entire content of their life, the problems of hedonistic ideology and consumer practice lose all significance. The most that man can do and desire as the greatest happiness is to work, to associate with people, to create and, of course, consume ("we eat in order to live"); this is what is in your power, what is required of you and what you have as your actual life. It is only when they are blinded by fanaticism that people are capable of renouncing the fullness of life, the wealth of enjoyment, the unity of action and desire for the sake of the ideals of idleness and parasitism, exclusively for the sake of petty consumer interests. It is impossible to select a parallel for an assessment of this sort of self-denial, of which we have conditionally suspected mankind. To use the words of the Soviet poet Mikhail Svetlov, we would call it a struggle for non-existence.

An affirmative answer to the question of whether a link exists between activity and enjoyment is correct both in theory and practice. But in a society with antagonistic classes this unity between labour and enjoyment is distorted and false, and often turned into its opposite. Under capitalism labour cannot bring people the highest enjoyment; it cannot become the underlying element of their happiness and a means of development. Under these conditions material wealth becomes hostile to its creators, to the working people. This paradox is called alienation. In the process of labour, which gives rise to domination over nature, neither the working conditions nor the content of work are de-



terminated by the working people; its fruits are appropriated either by private proprietors or by the state as a universal capitalist. The working people are increasingly wasted spiritually; in the process of labour they do not freely unfold their physical and spiritual energy, but exhaust their physical nature and destroy their spirit.

How can man unfold his essential strength in labour under capitalism when it is not he who involves the natural world in production, while capitalist production draws him into its system? How can work for the capitalist enrich man, i.e., how can it foster the free development of the individual's physical and spiritual potentialities when labour is stripped of its intellectual, aesthetic and moral content? Under capitalism involvement in labour activity increasingly turns the individual into a one-sided, partial man. In addition, "the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, the poorer he himself—his inner world—becomes".\*

Inasmuch as in the capitalist world material production is regarded as a secondary form of activity and to the extent that participation in it remains even outside moral assessment (or is given hypocritical recognition as an additional stimulator), man sees in labour not the satisfaction of his own requirement but only a compulsive means of satisfying other requirements. In labour he "does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy".\*\* He does not see the positive significance of his vital activity, does not feel a sense of responsibility and does not breathe the air of freedom.

Under capitalism man feels free and contented only in activity which, he feels, has meaning and is unconstrained. In capitalist society he seeks emancipation from the oppression of depressing functionality, from segmentation, which prevents him from voluntarily entering reality and jettisoning the indifferent, detached attitude to reality. It seems to him that here he is escaping the influence of things, that

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\* Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1975, p. 272.

\*\* *Ibid.*, p. 274.

he is himself commanding them. Here—in the realm of consumption—he has a sense of freedom.

As participation in production of wealth, which holds him in bondage, becomes more meaningless to man he adopts an increasingly indifferent attitude to labour, submerges himself ever deeper in the world of consumer interests, sets himself the more sordid aims and clings more doggedly to the semblance of freedom. "Certainly," Marx notes, "eating, drinking, procreating, etc., are also genuinely human functions. But taken abstractly, separated from the sphere of all other human activity and turned into sole and ultimate ends, they are animal functions."\*

But in capitalist society, apart from his work, man is involved in a mass of other social relations, in which he might compensate for his alienation in labour. This might be true if labour were only the function of producing commodities. Actually, it can by no means be reduced to this function: labour has created and continues to create man. It performs the function of the self-generation of man. Thus, if labour is alienated, it is the source of alienation in all other forms of human activity.

In the social relations obtaining in an antagonistic society man remains a functional element, an anonymous executer of the depersonalised will of things. His own will gradually evaporates like boiling water in a red-hot pan. Under capitalism the objective value of social prescriptions is as indifferent to the executer as the objective importance of labour. What remain are obligations lacking human warmth and denied the illumination of comprehended purposefulness. Man functions, creating, if there is a need for it, the semblance of interest in the performance of the social role accorded him.

From the formal, judicial standpoint the relations between people in an antagonistic society become functional relations. In them the importance of each individual is determined chiefly by the value of the services he is able to provide. Where we see something else we find either a bigoted camouflage of the motivations of service (a mass

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\* Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 275.

example of this is the doctrine of human relations, whatever the odes devoted to them) or observe the casual nature of human relations from the standpoint of the rationally operating system of social institutions. This fortuity may become a necessity only when it evolves into a tendency opposed to the capitalist system.

The masses are prompted to adopt a consumer orientation by the official social and political life of capitalist society, from which they are expelled and where bureaucratic arbitrary rule is legalised. A spirit of alienation reigns even in the bourgeois state apparatus itself. A growing number of officials are doomed to incomprehension of the purport of their activity in the context of the operation of the machine as a whole. Knowledge is doled out to them sparingly and confined to the minimum needed for the fulfilment of a single rationalised operation. Under capitalism the civil servant is as much a functionary, a partial man, as those to whom he issues orders. He does not go farther than to attempt to turn state aims into bureaucratic aims, or treats them as personal aims. The latter are subordinated to the consumer interests we are already familiar with. Hence the specious character of administration, the ostentatious zeal, the corruption of the apparatus and the attempts to achieve freedom outside the dehumanising duties and functional relations of capitalist society.

In capitalist society alienation manifests itself also in the field of culture, where man runs into a widening world of spiritual wealth. But having neither the means, the strength, the time nor the appropriate training, he finds himself unable to assimilate all this wealth. If he finds access to this wealth it is only outwardly, by acquiring knowledge in the undecoded form of ready-made formulas, adapted conclusions, norms or directives, or by familiarising himself with it through the acceptance of forgeries.

As a consequence of this mode of involvement in capitalist society and assimilation of culture, the individual does not feel he is freely operating in it and does not become part of it. Incapable of anything save infantile social reflexes and having no understanding of the world in which he lives, alienated man is unable practically to assimilate the wealth of culture, which represents his own crystallised

essence, and finds himself under its oppressive heel, for bourgeois culture is used as an instrument of class rule.

Thus, fitted into production and managerial processes, realised science opposes the blue-collar (and, to a large extent, the white-collar) worker as capital, belonging to capital in one way or another, and used as a means of exploitation. The strength of science is alienated from man inasmuch as it does not come forward in the form of his own strength.

Even in the case of a person professionally engaged in science, his work under capitalism is alienated activity; first, because spiritual production is likewise fragmented on account of the division of labour in science, while the limited function performed by him prevents him from understanding the integral significance of the entire process of scientific activity and does not give him deliverance from "professional imbecility"; second, because in the epoch of state-monopoly capitalism this activity is subordinated to petty bureaucratic tutelage with its striving to organise and dehumanise everything; third, because in its results—ideas, discoveries, inventions—scientific activity divorces itself, slips away from its creators, acquiring an independent existence that is alien to them, and is used for purposes that have nothing in common with the aims of science and are even hostile to science (for military purposes, or intensifying exploitation, for controlling behaviour, and so forth).

Art culture, too, finds itself in bourgeois society's "zone of alienation"; it becomes an important element of the bourgeois organisation, a covertly operating means of manipulating people. This splits art culture into mass and élitarian culture. The former, permeated with the cult of consumption, becomes a means of diversion, a colossal factory of dreams. Small wonder it is called conserved and cheap, a reservoir of illusions, a culture of quantitative superiority, a translation of culture into the language used for advertising detergents, the folklore of industrial man, a disorganised subproduct of real culture, and so forth. The scenario designation of serially produced and mostly visual mass culture is to embellish the world in which the victim of alienation lives. Its purpose is to provide the means of oblivion, of

distraction from the alienation of life, to propound standardised tastes, desires and hopes, to proliferate the sense of contentedness under conditions where there is more than adequate reason for serious discontent. Its influence on the mind of the individual produces a "pseudo-world".\*

Subordinated to commercial interests and the perverted requirements of its consumer, winning the market on account of its cheapness and huge circulation, and becoming an enjoyment service, the mass culture of capitalist society achieves its purposes by influencing the subconscious, by promoting the cult of strength, sex and entertainment. In its own way it has been successful in the fulfilment of its function, flexibly and speedily responding to fashion, forming it and, at the same time, remaining entirely dependent on it. In their turn, élitarian culture and avant-gardism, resting on motifs of the criticism of the sense of contentedness, depend on mass culture in the same way as the positive depends on the negative.

In capitalist society the large number of people employed in spiritual production have become clerks of scientific and artistic business with all the ensuing consequences. The functionary of mass culture does not take his work seriously, being aware of or guessing its actual purpose, and conscious of the crude stereotype character of the creative process in which he participates. He regards the work giving him an income and a status solely as a mask. He can only dream of dropping this mask, and in this dream he surmounts the materialised relations between the artist and the public, gets through to the audience, by-passing the organisational, ideological and financial barriers in bourgeois society. Similarly, the scientist dreams of achieving a level of universality in his knowledge that would enable him, in the awareness of his irreplaceability, drop the humiliating mask of a submissive functionary in a narrow field of knowledge, and allow him to quit the exhausting struggle for competitiveness. He dreams of becoming, at the price of his own efforts, master of his own cognitive interests and the party responsible for the utilisation of the results of his own scientific quests.

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\* C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*, New York, 1956, p. 314.

Thus, only by understanding the destructive operation of capitalist exploitation and alienation can one appreciate how the growth of material possibilities in the sphere of consumption, representing an important milestone of social progress, led not to a higher development level of the individual but to consumer ideology, to the hedonistic ideal and practice with their social, psychological and moral distortions.

Consumer cares worry the classes, circles, groups and substrata that in one way or another feel the pressure of an alienated world, including those to whose advantage it is to preserve that world. Organised as a class, the bourgeoisie seek to step up consumption, using all the economic levers available to them, from state regulation and consumer credit to huge outlays on advertising. This is not accidental. The average profit rate tends to drop. One of the means of combating this tendency is mass production. Although during the past few decades the capitalist world has witnessed a steep rise of the cost of production and marketing due to the higher prices of raw materials and labour power and the larger expenditures on plant and research, this cost is distributed among the growing mass of serially produced commodities, thereby yielding a continued maximum profit. But this requires an expanding market and organised sales: mass production demands mass consumption and pressure on the market by special, drastic psychological or extra-economic means.

For the bourgeois consciousness the ascetic or stoic ideals are losing their primacy. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx wrote that the bourgeoisie's actual ideal was the ascetic, usurious miser opposed by the ascetic but producing slave, the worker having no more means than necessary to go on wanting to live. The less a person eats and drinks, the fewer books he buys, the less frequently he goes to the theatre, to balls, to the cafe, the less he thinks, loves, theorises, sings, draws, and so on, the more he saves. As the bourgeois sees it, a person has to "economise" on participation in society's affairs, on compassion, on trust, and so forth. All passions and all activity have to be subordinated to the single passion of gain. "The less you are, the less you express your own life, the more you have, i.e., the

greater is your *alienated* life, the greater is the store of your estranged being."<sup>\*</sup> In the hands of one person mankind's alienated might becomes superhuman force. Represented in money as the fullest equivalent of man's essential strength, it is capable of turning impression into reality and vice versa.

Marx's characteristic of the bourgeoisie's ideal in life was exact and true in his day. But with the prominence now given to extravagance, thoughtless consumption and the cult of comfort, the situation has somewhat changed. The aspiration for accumulation, for the self-growth of value has been and remains the inducement of capitalist production. But it is no longer accompanied by self-denial. Due to the discrepancy between accumulation and consumption it is now possible to shift the centre of gravity from one ideal to another. Inasmuch as the guideline on accumulation has solely accumulation as its aim, while the guideline on consumption gives the orientation solely on consumption, one-sidedness (either an "economical man" or a "consuming man") becomes inevitable in the ideals of the bourgeois consciousness.

The success of consumer ideology was facilitated also by changes in the condition and guidelines of a numerous substratum of the petty bourgeoisie. In the epoch of the "democratisation of business" it is extremely difficult to run a clear-cut line separating it from white-collar workers and intellectuals, on the one hand, and from the middle bourgeoisie, on the other. Whereas formerly the small entrepreneur usually realised the blueprint of his career independently, displaying stoical restraint and ascetic self-denial, today it is impossible to give effect to individualistic inducements outside the corporate system of business. Hope for success in business, for the "capitalisation of posts" can only be given by activity within the framework of big business.

Being in an organisation and in the resultant system of social dependencies, the agent of capitalist social life has constantly to demonstrate his fitness for the jobs he holds and for the posts he looks forward to fill. To conform means

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\* Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 309.

to be utterly loyal to the interests of the corporation or to one link or another of a state institution. It means to be a convinced adherent of the sense of contentedness, to harmonise one's aims and guidelines with those that are predominant.

But career advancement is accompanied by changes in the consumption level, which is usually above the real income, for it serves as a claim to a higher post. Expenditures are thus one of the means of the competitive struggle. (The difference between income and expenditure is covered by consumer credit, which has reached astronomical proportions during the past few decades.) There is competition in spending, and in consumption, which knows no bounds and is aimed at winning prestige and trust. Under capitalism prestige is given by social status most tangibly embodied in consumer spending. The function of control is exercised by the watchful eye of conformist public opinion. In order to avoid being discredited by it and ensure a further rise up the hierarchal ladder, the participant in this competition has to abide by the order and tastes prescribed under capitalism ("this is necessary", "position has its responsibilities", and so forth), and profess the appropriate convictions, which boil down to the approved dogmas of the sense of contentedness. Any violation of order, of the norm of purchases, spells out a lowering of prestige. Conformist opinion acts with sadistic cruelty, persecuting the non-conformist with the same zeal that the Inquisition persecuted heretics in the Middle Ages.

The participant in this competition cannot extricate himself from the vicious circle of conventional purchases. Consumer ballyhoo haunts him all his life. On the one hand, he is constantly urged on by his credit debt, because a breach of obligations immediately threatens him with ruin and ostracism by public opinion, which is particularly finicky over such matters. Such a breach adversely affects or altogether excludes the possibility for further advancement.

Bourgeois society is highly interested in this ballyhoo, encouraging it in every way not only for sales considerations: the featuring of *dolce vita* stimulates the growth of labour productivity and socially submissive behaviour. It whispers, as it were: "You dislike and probably even hate your job.



But if you are efficient you will have more possibilities of deriving pleasure from the acquisition and enjoyment of new commodities and services. Besides, higher consumption is the guarantee of further advancement and, consequently, of more freedom during non-working time. Possibly this depends on opportunity but it also depends on you: you may reach a position where you need not work at all and, at the same time, broaden your consumption."

Further, the participant in inner-corporate capitalist competition is drawn into the merry-go-round of purchases of his own will. Of course, extravagance in consumption with debts hanging round his neck compels him to exert himself, constantly spurred by fear of breakdowns, failures and trouble at work. This fills his life with unending anxiety and uncertainty for which he pays with fatigue and nervous stress. In this rat race he has to sacrifice not only his health: in order to remain in the race, to discharge his duties on the proper level, he has to economise on self-development, go into narrow specialisation, limit his association with other people and his cultural requirements, and frequently backslide on his morals. This forced asceticism and depersonalisation takes place precisely at a time when the general complication of social life and of the requirements of production and management objectively demand the maximum development, not the narrowing, suppression and extinction, of the individual's strength.

But habit easily becomes second nature. Spiritual emptiness and dehumanisation demand a price. The individual psychologically adapts himself to a functional existence. The anonymous actor gets used to his role, and he begins to like it. A life-time of play-acting, existence guided by the opinion of others, and anonymity cease to worry and bother him. All he wants is success embodied in consumer symbols (quantity and value of purchases), he overcomes fear, violates the taboos of conformist public opinion, linking his ego more closely with a studied, approved role. He pawns his soul to Mephistopheles in exchange for things: fashionable, costly, in short supply. Freedom is identified with success, patriotism with allegiance and chauvinism, happiness with a carefree life, all-sided development with dilettantism. Consumer cares supersede all interests, subordinate all

impulses and underlie all calculations and personal plans. The danger of depersonalisation, of dissolution in a crowd is removed by an insignificant and petty diversity in the consumer choice, by a magnified desire to create the impression of free-thinking and of inimitability in clothes, appointments and rituals. The individual becomes an artificial man and an ideal object for ideological manipulation. Nothing non-human is any longer alien to him.

The sense of contentedness is linked chiefly with the consumer ideal. Devoid of spirituality, it is utterly prosaic. Hegel noted that in bourgeois society the individual is active not by virtue of his own integrity but under the pressure of external circumstances. Forced to work by need and to abide by laws without respecting them, he is deprived of plasticity and integrity and is enmeshed in a web of dependencies. His independence surrenders to the commonplace. However much a rebellious individual quarrels with the world, however much he is thrown from side to side, he ultimately smashes his teeth, and with his desires and opinions blends into the relations and reason of that world, with its coupling of things, and acquires his appropriate little place in it.\*

In Hegel's day the bourgeois ideal in life was simply wingless and could have some sort of reason. But the present sense of contentedness has become simply vulgar. It has made a clean break with ideals without regret, as with the attributes of antediluvian romanticism. The place of heroes has been taken over by the "lonely crowd", the poetry of hopes has given way to the prose of consumer calculations, paltry expectations and petty aims. There is no room for heroic emotions when attention is focussed exclusively on things and on the ability to acquire and use them, when the whole philosophy of life boils down to getting as much enjoyment as possible with the least effort.

These ideas were quite accurately conveyed by Alberto Moravia. Following an accident the leading character of one of his books, an American, finds himself in the nether world. But the paradise he had known in detail since child-

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\* See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke*, Bd. 14, Frankfurt am Main, 1970, S. 220.

hood from the Scriptures did not materialise. He found himself in a giant department store. Excited beyond measure, people were crowding the counters buying things they had always cherished. Their attention was attracted by a parade of new commodities, while the things they had bought earlier were by some miracle converted into crisp cheques again and again.

However, consumer society is not devoid of a sort of lure. Under pressure of competition, the cult of acquisition is steadily perfected. It can tempt and attract: along with forgeries there is a mass of really valuable services and necessary things. It is fostered by deafening and repressive advertising, by marketing, which absorbs huge sums of money, by the system of consumer credits, commercial remissions, cheap sales, and so forth. Not everybody can withstand the temptation of participating in the "greatest freedom of the 20th century", in the unrestricted (with the exception of money, of course) orgy of buying. This freedom is so simple: "Consume and let consume!"

The individual becomes a captive of this way of life, which kindles his consumer instincts. Man, writes the American psychologist Erich Fromm, describing this state, has become an eternal suckling, always waiting for something, and invariably disappointed. With his whole life concentrated on the manufacture, sale and consumption of commodities, man himself becomes a commodity.

Rather than being happy the sense of contentedness is made happy. It proudly wears the regalia of content. In its eyes an unhappy person is only an exception to the rule, a sick man. The notion about this "normative" happiness brings us to some moral problems of the sense of contentedness.

### AGONY OF MORALS

In a world in which everything is concentrated around consumption, the predominant morals (and these are always the morals of the governing class) writhe in agony.

This is closely linked with moral alienation under capitalism, with anarchic and uncontrollable relations between peo-

ple, with contradictions between the objective and subjective aspects of morals, between social and private morals, between utility and enthusiasm, expediency and freedom, duty and happiness. Under these conditions the individual does not have the feeling that he is the maker of morals, for the latter are wrested from the context of realisable historical action. As a result of the capitalist division of labour, the individual's ejection from social being, the isolation of production from consumption, of material from spiritual activity, of theory from practice, and the division of rights and duties, the individual loses the link between the development of society and his own self-development. The social functions prescribed for him (to work, to serve in the army, to obey, and so forth) are regarded by him as external dictates that disregard his inclinations and requirements, that ignore everything comprising the individual inimitability of the executor. He regards the development of society as a process taking place exclusively at the expense of the exhaustion of his own strength. For that reason moral prescriptions, perhaps with the exception of duty to the people closest to him, are most distinctly seen by him as the means by which strength is squeezed out of him. For access to its bosom capitalist society exacts an exorbitant tribute, demanding the acceptance of standards and dogmas, of whose origin the individual has not the faintest idea, which he has not created and which are not even coherently explained to him. By complying with them he helps this society to appropriate his own strength, spirit and energy. "I owe" has the appearance of a promissory note to a money-lender with onerous terms: the harder I try to repay it the larger my debt grows. This goes on throughout the individual's life. The hour never comes when he can say with relief: I owe nobody nothing. By way of reciprocity, capitalist society offers culture which, as a matter of fact, the individual is unable to assimilate, security and legal guarantees which are likewise suspect, for they signify that the individual either perishes ingloriously on the field of battle or gradually shrivels from exhausting exploitation.

The rank-and-file agent of the capitalist system regards the inescapable dependence on society, on social groups, on other people usually in an illusory light as the

despotism of social over asocial, private life, as a sacrifice of "his" interests for the sake of "its" (society's) benefit.

In this situation the idea about happiness and duty, about their interrelation, is inevitably distorted. Imposed duty, separated from happiness, from the self-development of the individual, comes forward in official garb as a canonised and merciless demand. It refuses to reckon with the circumstances, requirements and desires of the individual. By means of social suggestion it penetrates his mind, subordinates his will, orients his thinking and dictates manifestations of his emotions.

Still, the individual does his best to tear away from the tenacious embrace of duty, looks for ways if not to break it then at least to relax, to weaken it, depending on circumstances. Even if it is formalised and its demands are quite obvious, he nevertheless in secret looks for a loophole. "Decent" ways are found for evading duties, for instance, by counterposing individual duty to social duty. It is impossible to list the entire multitude of ways of evasion. But their essence is conveyed by the motto of Balzac's Vautrain: "There are no principles, there are circumstances."

In its turn, happiness, alienated from morals, comes forward as "*continuell* successe in obtaining these things which a man from time to time desireth, that is to say, *continuell* prospering".\* It lies, above all, in the possession of the attributes of happiness—things, power, prestige. What is not acquired by the individual, what is out of his reach becomes the object of bitter envy. The individual becomes a dipsod, a man permanently experiencing the torment of thirst which he cannot quench. Any achieved level of satisfaction proves to be spectral, transient and constantly substandard. Where pursuit of consumption reigns, aspiration is never satisfied, because new aspirations are awakened before their former level is achieved.\*\* The individual is doomed to an interminable struggle between what he actually needs and what he desires. He is not attracted by show-window morals, for he sees that to oblige an abstract "higher

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\* Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, London, 1943, p. 30.

\*\* See P.-H. Chombart de Lauwe (France), "The Genesis and the Role of Aspirations and Needs in the Societies of the 20th Century", *Filosofskiye nauki*, No. 1, 1969, p. 78.

blessing" it constantly calls upon him to sacrifice his happiness for the sake of alienated duty. Wherever possible he tries to circumvent the boundaries limiting his aspiration for happiness, being guided by the rule that "he is worthy of success who has achieved it". Amorality and cynicism become the fellow-travellers of bourgeois society's moral life.

Such, in brief, is the picture of the moral relations, guidelines and attitudes connected with vital activity of the ruling classes and the strata associated with them. We shall return to the question of the powerful forces opposing moral alienation and hypocrisy, of the growth of hatred for oppressors and of the duty of resistance to the outworn social system.

Having become a mass phenomenon in the epoch of capitalism's general crisis, the sense of contentedness has found itself in the epicentre of history's most devastating moral crisis that is deforming and undermining all morality.

There is today not the least doubt that such a crisis exists. Bourgeois ideologists write of "the reality of the moral crisis",\* noting that "we are in the midst of a moral crisis".\*\* Sociologists, journalists, psychologists, teachers, priests and lawyers write of its suffocating atmosphere and of the decline of morals. It has long been noted that there is an epidemic of crime and violence. Their incidence is outstripping the population growth rate. A growing proportion of the lawlessness consists of unmotivated crime and juvenile delinquency. Violence is inseparable from the growth of cruelty, indifference to the sufferings of others and loss of human warmth. Fear and suspicion are mounting alongside violence. Loneliness and a keen sense that the links with other people are unreliable are their inevitable consequences. There appear ugly, pathological forms of individualism, under which attention is concentrated on one's own isolated existence, considerations of convenience. Loneliness is accompanied by the increasing pressure on the inviolability of private life. The American sociologist Vance Packard

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\* James Hemming, *Individual Morality*, Bristol, 1969, p. 4.

\*\* Robert Moskin, *Morality in America*, New York, 1966, p. 3.

gave his study of this invasion of the intimate sphere of the life of his compatriots the title *The Naked Society*. A decline is to be observed in the respect people have for what is created by the hands of men and in the quality of goods. There is a similarly clear-cut decline of the prestige of the family, of the authority exercised by parents, of the institution of friendship, of the various "buffer" collectives that had formerly been centres of human association, support and services. The so-called conflict of generations has grown acute. The influence of cultural standards and ethical norms is weakening. All sorts of social disorganisation (drug-addiction, alcoholism, licentiousness, and so on) are mounting at a dizzy rate. Toleration of many vices and susceptibility to irrational inclinations have reached a menacing magnitude. Gaping breaches of morality are to be observed in socio-political life. "White-collar crime", corruption, indifference to official duty and political indifference are proliferating. It is also obvious that all these crisis symptoms are evidence of by no means a slight indisposition or a transient decline of bourgeois morality.

Faith in the "sacrosanct principles" of official morality is swiftly fading in consumer, mass society. The hypocrisy of this morality grows more pronounced as trust in the bourgeois social organisation becomes historically less and less justified and more and more dangerous to the destinies of mankind. Moral alienation, the deep division between inducements and limiting standards, the rupture of social links and the dehumanisation of relations are reaching a level hitherto unknown.

Despite the epidemic of cynicism and sham piety afflicting the consumer-oriented individual of capitalist society, this individual strives for some sort of moral equilibrium. He feels impelled to believe in the correctness and reasonableness of his aims in life, of his behaviour and way of thinking orientated on success and consumption. The principal element of the sense of contentedness—satisfaction with one's activity, prestige status, way of thinking and the entire order of things—becomes elusive in the absence of such faith. Can one be happy if one is aware of the criminality and asociality of one's behaviour?

For the sense of contentedness it is thus vital to find a

*modus vivendi*, to reconcile and harmonise two mutually excluding guidelines—consumer psychology with its egoism, on the one hand, and the awareness of the moral importance and value of one's activity, on the other. In principle, there is no solution for this antinomy. One of these guidelines must be dropped. However, this way out is totally unacceptable to the sense of contentedness, but the stress of the conflict is likewise unendurable. A solution must be found, and they are looking for it by trying to achieve the desired equilibrium with the aid of artificial contentedness. With capitalism in the grip of a severe moral crisis, with morality dulled by polished moral slogans, with relations between people distorted and entangled and with moral requirements split, the impossible is being achieved.

The sense of contentedness usually gets the results it wants by a number of overlapping methods. First, by diminishing bourgeois society's moral demands of the individual possessing the sense of contentedness and by making that individual less demanding of himself. The ideas about what must be and what is possible are devaluated and brought into line with actual behaviour. The sense of contentedness is brought round to the conclusion—which it reaches also by itself—that one can do less and less for society. In an age of great revolutionary changes, an age of unparalleled social dynamism, the sense of contentedness, stuck in the bureaucratic labyrinth of careerism, preoccupied with consumer cares and deprived of a realistic view of the world, at last finds blind fate sweeping the continent where it can accomplish something and feel a positive responsibility for what it has or failed to accomplish. In this rapidly dwindling territory it is enough for the sense of contentedness to do something trivial to extricate itself from a ticklish situation and feel it is exhaustively discharging its duty. In oversatiated self-contentedness it achieves equilibrium in ways that are by no means immaculate.

Second, by limiting the sphere of the application of moral assessments. The consumer-oriented individual is strict only in community relations (family, friends, neighbours), but is indulgent in the sphere where personal and social duty adjoin. Bourgeois society tacitly sanctions his self-limitation



and raises it to the status of a norm. The Biblical "he who is not against us is with us" becomes the guiding principle. By fencing morality off from the attitude to modern social movements, the individual acquires a sense of respectability with no particular effort. Further there extends a world in which any assertion about morality is suspect. Consequently, one can act in that world as though there are no morals generally, on the alleged grounds that in a major event people's morals are of no significance whatever: they are no more than a statistical whim.

True, even in this narrow sphere not everything is simple and clear. Here, too, the sense of contentedness does not comport itself in the best possible manner, saturating even community relations not so much with solicitude as with consumer considerations. Nonetheless, it is only in these relations that it is prepared to discuss the question of ideals and responsibility, and it is only here that it counts on acquiring the self-satisfaction it needs so much, even in co-existence with concentration camps, persecution of democrats, unemployment and poverty.

Third, by emasculating moral requirements, by reducing them to an uncritical acceptance of stereotype conformist public opinion. "Man for himself", as the sense of contentedness is sometimes called, finds equilibrium in the scrupulous fulfilment of accepted rituals and requirements, convincing himself that he has thereby removed the moral non-liquids.

Where "man for himself", playing at give-away, is in a moral "equilibrium" we find distorted moral feeling, a false and manipulated conscience, an artificially created "conscience of the privileged". This is not a sick conscience in the sense in which Maxim Gorky characterised the creative quests of Dostoyevsky, but the normal conscience of a sick society. Submerged in lethargy, it deliberately sustains this state of mind with the aid of tranquillisers, whose meaning may be reduced to the following brief and simple assessment: "We work, consume, love and quarrel, rejoice and grieve, bring up children and complain of illness. That is how it was, is and will be. Everything is in order."

Sham conscience does not ask tiresome questions: How and for whom we work? What is the purpose of consumption? Whom we love and who we quarrel with? What we

rejoice over and what grieves us? Whom are we bringing up in our children? Who benefits by having nothing changed? By hastily harmonising inducements with guidelines, the sham conscience justifies the pursuit of personal success, gives people a free hand and enables them to act with a "clear conscience" and with growing chances of achieving that success. Petty and grave misdemeanours committed for the sake of a career, frequently purely out of habit or cowardice, renunciation of reasonable compromises in favour of unprincipled ones, recognition of solely *ad hoc* prescriptions as moral—all this is approved by the "clear conscience" at best at the price of certain wavering. Without tormenting thought it absolves these misdemeanours with tight-fisted philanthropy.

In turn, prevailing capitalist public opinion goes to all lengths to enable the "clear conscience", functioning instead of quashed living moral feeling, to operate uninterruptedly, without self-diagnosis, without striving for an independent identification of responsibility and guilt. Its message is that the bourgeois social organisation merits trust on the grounds that it links up individualistic expectations with consumer behaviour, allegedly according to each person equal possibilities or chances for success. If for some reason the individual has not availed himself of that chance, the organisation washes its hands, as much as to say that you have only yourself to blame. You have been either inadequate in your morals (in the event of a flagrant and recorded violation of the standard) or, on the contrary, your morals have been much too high, i.e., you have been unable to accommodate your morals to the consumer standard and unwisely believed in the tenets of sham morality.

The manufacture of myths and consumer ideology lead to moral degradation. The sense of contentedness is confined, in basic spheres of vital activity, solely to a decor of morality, which is then used as a commodity that is much in demand. All its prescriptions boil down to recipes for the auto-suggestion of content.

Moral degradation is not simply the outcome of consumer ideology, but also a cause of its development, because it demolishes social links and ideals, clearing the way for cynical consumer behaviour. The sense of contentedness is

fundamentally a means of deideologisation. Limited to demonstrations of loyalty to capitalism, its morals have no convictions to rest upon, representing nothing more than adaptation to the bourgeois organisation.

What has the moral of consumption and pleasure-seeking, whose motto is "better a boil on the body of society than a scratch on my own neck", in common with morals embodying the interests of society's progress? The sense of contentedness regards itself as the mainstay of social morals and is always ready with an emphatic denunciation of amorality and nihilism, against which it has the basest maxims about the sanctity of accepted standards and about moderation. But this is precisely what accentuates the paradoxicality of the fact that while engaging in grandiloquent moralisation and being blinded by its own good intentions the sense of contentedness goes hand in hand with amorality. Is this not proved by the growing respectability of legal and semi-legal gangsterism running criminal operations: gambling dens, the sale of drugs, bookmaking and money-lending, operations whose annual revenue in the USA, for example, amounts from 25 to 50 billion dollars? While pharisaically stigmatising social disorganisation (so-called hypersociality), the sense of contentedness cannot understand that amorality and cynicism are the inevitable products of its own morality, of its legalised amorality. Besides, as we have already noted, it abides by "its own" moral of accommodation and career-seeking only conventionally, relatively.

Banal precepts are much too weak a weapon against nihilism. When morality is reduced solely to bringing actions into line with the prevailing standards, even the formal impeccability of these actions gives no indication whatever of their actual morals, which not only regulate and watch over behaviour but also induce people to fight for advanced forms of social life. This struggle gives shape to higher models of behaviour, man being not only the object of external regulation but also the maker of moral standards. Therefore, when the sense of contentedness waxes indignant over the nihilistic imperative of permissibility, it implies mainly the impermissibility of actions against the bourgeois social organisation, the impermissibility of deviations from the standards established in it, a demand for a return to sub-

missiveness, and only superficially presupposes the observance of elementary rules of human association.

The sense of contentedness does not distinguish nihilism from participation in the struggle for society's revolutionary transformation. Both come under the heading of social offences, disorganisation and pathology, inasmuch as they go beyond the framework of the prescribed status positions, planned reactions, of the list of expectations, violating the integrity and smooth operation of the bourgeois social organisation. With the sense of contentedness, morality means nothing more nor less than the harmony of behaviour with prevailing bourgeois standards and models. Behaviour that cannot be properly prognosticated is regarded as almost asocial and immoral. Participation in progressive social movements is qualified entirely in accordance with the letter and spirit of this morality, in the same way as, say, crime. The individual who surrenders his sense of responsibility to conformist public opinion inevitably limits morality to waiting for approval from this opinion, to fitting his behaviour to the required pattern. Its conventional fidelity to the formula of permissibility only signifies that neither the individual nor the collective is allowed to ascertain the social meaning of his or its thoughts and actions, that prevailing bourgeois standards are not subject to assessment, that resistance to the dogmas of the capitalist system is tantamount to a renunciation of moral freedom and of actions conforming to the undistorted dictates of conscience and mind.

The moral equilibrium wanted so badly by the sense of contentedness demonstrates the entire depth of its self-deception, for it leads to impasses that only aggravate the degradation of the individual under capitalism. In the final analysis, the sense of contentedness, which thirsts for cloudless equilibrium, finds an exacerbated crisis in its inner world. The remedy proves to be more dangerous than the disease. Symbolic fidelity to values internally negated and the actual approach to values nominally censured lead to constant wavering, reassessments and a feeling of guilt. The problem can only be settled by renouncing the morality of deideologised consumption. But this is obstructed by the myths of the sense of contentedness, which stand eternal guard over the old order.

## CHAPTER TWO

### ANXIETIES AND MYTHS OF THE SENSE OF CONTENTEDNESS

*Good resolutions . . . are simply  
cheques that men draw on a bank  
where they have no account.*

OSCAR WILDE

#### SELF-COGNITION

The sense of contentedness finds, sooner or later, that there are other attitudes to life, that there is, in particular, a sense of wretchedness. Even if the consciousness of content is predominant, the absence of uniformity still remains to be explained. The question that must be asked is: If the given perception of the world is natural and true, how do other attitudes to life appear and how must they be assessed?

From the standpoint of the sense of contentedness sense of wretchedness is nothing less than a generalised expression of individual disappointments, of frustrated hopes, in short, an anomaly, a false subjectivity, that does not lend itself to rational explanation.

The sense of contentedness recognises, of course, that it is impossible to achieve absolute gratification, which it regards as something in the nature of a psychological analogue of God. Even by reducing one's desires to a bare minimum one cannot reach the summit of gratification.

While remaining within the bounds of common sense, it nevertheless considers that practically every individual can become relatively contented by undergoing, as we already know, moral rearmament. All that is necessary is to want! But then how is one to explain the anomaly of the sense of wretchedness, which did not desire or, perhaps, was unable to become contented?

The method of looking for an answer to this question is curious, to say the least. The sense of contentedness

adopts the following line of reasoning. Since in every social environment there have in all ages been contented and discontented people, with this division not coinciding directly with their property status, roles, prestige and other social indications, and since there has always been a division into optimists and pessimists regardless of the changes in the social environment, a social analysis of the environment cannot be productive. Using data accessible to a direct empirical perception and leaving the social world aside, one must consider the bio-psychological factors of the sense of wretchedness. With the exception of extraordinary cases, the origins of this state must allegedly be found in the inherited bio-psychological make-up of the individual.

It must be noted that while groping in the dark the sense of contentedness clings to a thread of actually existing links. It is quite probable that both the sense of wretchedness and the nihilistic world outlook of an individual have bio-psychological roots, that in some way they are connected with his genetic make-up, character and temperament, especially with the ups and downs of his life. One does not need an analytic mind to draw the following conclusion: the individual consciousness takes shape under the impact of a practically infinite number of factors, each of which, however infinitesimal and insignificant it may seem to be, is a link in a complex chain of dependencies. It is unquestionable that there are people who are easily hurt and react painfully even to not very dramatic twists in life. Moreover, there are many who, having inadequate steeling and experience of life, find themselves unable to cope with complicated situations, lack the flexibility for deciding important practical problems, have an unsociable, difficult, quarrelsome and irritable disposition, and are beset with a spirit of contrariness. There are misfits or simply people seriously suffering from various phobias. To a depressed person suffering from melancholy everything appears joyless and miserable, and from whatever plane he regards life it is invariably gloomy. To people of this type their own consciousness is wretched in self-reflection. And this is how it appears to others.

It cannot be denied that various circumstances affect, and very often quite seriously, the individual's state of mind, bringing him to nihilistic and pessimistic generalisations.

However, preoccupied with its quest for the causes of sham subjectivity, the sense of contentedness does not, and perhaps refuses to, notice facts of a contradictory character. For example, it does not notice that the link between unhappiness and the sense of wretchedness is neither direct nor necessarily of a strictly cause-and-effect nature. The sense of wretchedness and the nihilistic world outlook have a ramified system of roots, in which bio-psychological preconditions, personal experience or the whims of fate are by no means decisive, although they play a definite role.

Actually, the task is to understand the essential interaction between bio-psychological properties and the social environment. But this is obstructed by the dogmatism of the sense of contentedness, which counterposes social to asocial being. The bio-psychological exists in man not as a natural, extra-historical property, but as something transformed and processed by society. This can easily be seen if we consider pleasant and unpleasant emotions, on whose operation much in contentedness or wretchedness depends. These emotions are not immediately linked with the nervous or endocrine system of our organism, although that would seem to be the case. While unquestionably giving convictions, thoughts and ideas a definite hue, emotions are themselves influenced by the latter. As a consequence, emotions may reverse. Is not man capable of heroically accepting death for the sake of ideals with his behaviour giving him a sense of profound satisfaction? Or, on the contrary, has not the sense of contentedness experienced how artificial joy and disappointment are created by manipulation and ideological indoctrination?

The pleasant and the unpleasant have a complex ideological and psychological origin. Pleasure, joy, satisfaction and also the highest gratification (happiness), i.e., all the states towering above these emotions, are different reactions to the fulfilment (or anticipation) of the individual's plans, projects and aspirations. They are by no means derived from physiology, from fossilised, unchanging human nature. They belong to the social community. Everything related to these hopes, traditions, reminiscences and ideals, everything that facilitates their realisation, is pleasant, while what obstructs them is unpleasant. Something is not alien

because it is unpleasant, but it is unpleasant because it is alien, because it is inconsonant with or even runs counter to our expectations, traditions, customs and preferences.\* The polarisation of emotions into positive and negative is the result of the individual's life in society.

The attitude of the sense of contentedness to sham subjectivity is not categorically negative. Because the myths round which the sense of contentedness revolves are unreliable, the creators of the sense of contentedness have to make provision for something in the nature of a safety-valve. A second line of defence (much as preaching in a church has never made a lightning rod useless) is thereby created. The sense of contentedness is given a moderate, "sanitary" dose of pessimism and nihilism to make it immune against any overheating of contentedness. This shake-up even commands respect from the sense of contentedness, which is not in the least disturbed by its conventional cheerfulness. Although it accepts its prophets with open arms, it lends an ear to Cassandra. Injections of a critical attitude enable it to seem modern and acquire a certain respectability. But deep down it sees the worth of pessimism and nihilism (as, indeed, of everything else) only as amusements. If, as Johannes Becher ironically noted, it is convenient to be a pessimist, the sense of contentedness is eager to try this convenience.

But this is not all. The nihilistic vision of the world tempts the sense of contentedness also because this vision sanctions its own cynicism. It would be hard to conceive of a happier justification of the entire system of hedonistic consumer guidelines of the sense of contentedness than that of regarding nothing in life as being worthwhile. If everything is vanity, then each can choose any orientation in life, and nobody can censure him for this or incline him to other preferences, for this is as natural as sand in the desert.

But, having diverted attention from how the sense of contentedness feels, it must be remembered that the main purpose of the injections of nihilism is to remove the danger that bourgeois social myths may be exposed. Here the para-

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\* See B. F. Porshnev, *Social Psychology and History*, Moscow, 1966. pp. 115-17 (in Russian).



dox is that anxieties and apprehensions are used to drive out anxiety, alarm and dissatisfaction. This is reminiscent of the motto of homeopaths: Like is cured by like. The injections we have mentioned represent a specially composed and processed set of sham anxieties threatening all the members of the "contented" clan. Capitalist society's ideological machine carefully prepares this set and proliferates it in a package with bourgeois-optimistic ideas.

### **"THREATS TO CIVILISATION"**

The set of anxieties may be conditionally divided into two groups. The first embraces threats to civilisation, and the character of the second is immediately social. In the first group attention is attracted by the warnings of anthropological, ecological, urbanistic and demographic threats, of the information explosion, of the threat of new discoveries in science and technology described in advance by futurologists.

In its approach to these phenomena, especially when their causes have to be shown, the sense of contentedness finds it is helpless in its methods. It accentuates the minor aspects of threats, pushing their essential social aspect into the background.

While distorting the entire range of threats to civilisation by its non-class analysis, it makes haste to calm itself with the prospect that they will be removed by the bourgeois Establishment. Understandably, the socialist alternative to this reformism is completely ignored. The sense of contentedness thus performs a dual operation: it gives the impression that it is seriously alarmed and, at the same time, remains loyal to the conventional optimistic ideology.

### **Urbanisation**

The sense of contentedness places urbanisation high in the list of threats. Cities are growing steadily. Today they have approximately 25 per cent of the population. Some futurologists estimate that at the turn of the new century the proportion of urban dwellers will be between 70 and

90 per cent of the total population. These figures are now almost a fact in industrialised countries.

But what sort of life is to be observed in big cities and megalopolises? On the one hand, it is quite evident that the growth of towns is historically not accidental. The simultaneous employment of a considerable mass of means of production and labour power in a limited territory yields unquestioned economic benefits. In the towns with their concentration of industry it is easier than in other forms of settlement to co-operate labour, combine production and maintain contact with research institutes.

All forms of human activity are integrated and the threads linking all forms of association are tied into knots in the towns. Knowledge is produced in them, creativity proceeds and impulses are received for new forms of social organisation and for surmounting stagnation of all kinds. Social mobility is more developed in towns and the links of society and the individual are closer and more ramified.

On the other hand, to the sense of contentedness urbanisation is a fiend. The evil stemming from settlement in towns is summarised on several counts.

The rapid growth of towns is an ominous threat to health. The air is polluted by exhaust gases and industrial smoke. Smog, containing hundreds of thousands of tons of poison and absorbing nearly half of the ultra-violet rays of solar irradiation, hangs over industrial towns as though it were a mammoth bell-glass. This has given an expert grounds for saying that either people reduce air pollution or air pollution will reduce the number of people. But the "increase in air pollution is just one dramatic aspect of a continuing deterioration of our environment".\* A weightless and invisible danger lies in street noise that constantly rends the air of big cities. The fast rhythm of life and work has made people's hearing more acute. For that reason the head of a tired person is compared with a cave echoing the least noise. Auditory pollution intensifies the exhaustion of nerve centres, breaks the rhythm of the organism's activity, leads to heightened irritability, nervous disorders and general

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\* *Toward Century 21. Technology, Society and Human Values.* Ed. by C. S. Wallia, New York, 1970, p. 53.

fatigue, affects mental development and exposes people to grave diseases.

Further, the nervous system suffers from the rhythm of work and from the conditions of urban life. Congestion and transport difficulties constantly encountered by town dwellers cause concealed fatigue and exhaustion, which are not allayed even during leisure hours. As a result, there is a growing incidence of industrial and everyday accidents, and it requires very little to throw behaviour adaptation out of gear.

Urbanisation brings with it negative consequences of a socio-psychological order, too. Unlike villages and small towns, the large modern cities destroy the psychological sense of nearness, "informal relations", as a sociologist would say, weaken big families hallowed by the tradition of close relations. Changes of this nature intensify the sense of loneliness and lead to an anonymous existence.

Upon finding itself in the chaos of such assessments of urbanisation, the sense of contentedness goes from one extreme to the other. It sees cities as concentration points of all of civilisation's most acute contradictions, as the source of all evils. The cause of these ulcers is allegedly not capitalism, but the city as such. Hence the deurbanisation projects motivated by Rousseauian utopianism. The attempts at deurbanisation are unrealistic and mirror the inability to halt the spontaneity of the process and effectively direct it on a humanitarian basis in the interests of society.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that a trend projected not into the past but into the future is more characteristic of the sense of contentedness. However, from beginning to end urbanisation is regarded as a technical or an administrative problem, as an autonomous process isolated from society. All the hopes for bringing it under control are pinned on administrative decisions and technical means. State allocations and town-planning are the main levers of the reconstruction of towns. In the opinion of the sense of contentedness, capitalism is able gradually to eradicate the vices of the modern city with the help of the achievements of some sciences and by correspondingly orientating public opinion. It is asserted that it will be possible to plan the growth of towns. The police, it is said, will be able to abolish urban crime. Measures instituted in transportation

will put an end to traffic bottlenecks and to the sources of air pollution. Scientists will help to verdurise the huge megalopolises and provide adequate supplies of fresh water and acoustic comfort. Industry will be set apart from residential areas, while slums will be pulled down. Cultural centres will in time become accessible to all people. "Social engineers" will eliminate the horror of loneliness by promoting informal association. Psycho-analysts will help to allay phobias and lessen the wave of suicides. When smog, bustle and noise disappear, there will be a decline of the incidence of nervous disorders. In short, urban life will retain its benefits while ridding itself of all its shortcomings.

In the arguments of the sense of contentedness all the problems of urbanisation have a happy ending. With the removal of the threats harboured in urbanisation all the other problems still causing anxiety will be settled.

The dose of anxiety smoothly injected into the sense of contentedness by the ideological machine, and also anxieties springing from analyses and generalisations of its own observations are allayed and neutralised. The feeling of disorder gives way to a feeling of certainty in the future and, consequently, in the present as well. In an amazing manner prognostication exercises a reverse influence on people, and the utmost use is made of this by those who mould the sense of contentedness. No special action is required of the latter. All one has to do is to take an "unbiased" view of the threat (urbanisation or any other from the spectrum of anxieties), abide by conformist public opinion's assessment of the threat and subscribe to the therapy applied by the bourgeois organisation to that threat. For the sense of contentedness the "struggle" against the threat of urbanisation proceeds with the maximum conveniences.

How realistic are the expectations of the sense of contentedness? The very fact that to give effect to only the technical plan of modernising American cities will require a thousand billion dollars, or as much as the USA has spent for military purposes during the past 20 years, makes it plain that these expectations are unfounded. Of course, one can believe in a miracle. But if one looks at things realistically, it must be obvious that under the existing structure of ownership and power there is no hope that the state

and, still less, impecunious municipal councils, will suddenly cease economising on drives against poverty and on social insurance, education and health programmes.

But there is much more to this. Let us assume that noise, smog, congestion and traffic bottlenecks have been eliminated. That still leaves socio-psychological problems. Do crime and drug-addiction grow in cities only because the police force is much too small and inadequately operative? However, if the air becomes crystal pure and the noise background is normalised but unemployment remains can the threat harboured by urbanisation be considered as having been eliminated? What about the problem of education, high rents or racial segregation? What about the misery in the ghettos, which are "economic colonies"\* of the socially privileged urban districts? Technical and administrative decisions cannot remove fear, extinguish uncertainty, assuage loneliness or dilute the bitterness of the lower strata of capitalism's urban population. This requires something more than reformist aspirations.

Town improvement is, above all, a social problem, although it has a technical aspect as well. Urbanisation is not the cause but a manifestation of social troubles. Capitalism has squeezed everything possible from the spontaneous growth of towns. Today, in the age of the scientific and technological revolution, the organised development of towns has become one of the key conditions of social progress. The finest plans of modernisation and the most interesting technical town-building ideas come into conflict with private interests. Capitalism gives the essentially progressive process of the concentration of material and cultural values in towns ugly forms that, parallel with some development, bring people new suffering.

### Threat to Health

There is no doubt whatever that the sense of contentedness wants the elimination of the threats to health. The widespread maxim that happiness is health is regarded by it as the crowning wisdom.

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\* Edward C. Banfield, *The Unheavenly City. The Nature and Future of Our Urban Crisis*, Boston, 1970, p. 67.

At first glance there seems to be no reason for any particular anxiety. The plague has been wiped out long ago, medicines have been developed giving immunity against malaria, in industrialised countries the death rate from scarlet fever has dropped to less than one-hundredth, and the measles death rate is today negligible. Undisputed progress has been made in fighting venereal diseases; modern methods of treatment have diminished people's fear of pneumonia and bronchitis; and enteric fever and paratyphoid have been conquered. Polio has been struck off the list of killers, and appreciable headway has been made in the fight against dysentery and tuberculosis, which some 50-100 years ago was considered the most fearful disease.

In short, progress in medicine and health protection is beyond doubt. Nevertheless, even many well-informed medics remain haunted by fears. Against the background of its helplessness or weakness in face of some diseases, medicine's triumphs are not very convincing. Although the diminished death rate and the longer expectancy of life are important indicators of improved health, they do not mirror the situation as a whole. In some countries the death rate has dropped, but this is not due to any decrease of the incidence of disease. There are diseases, which, to quote doctors, are not as lethal as, say, infectious diseases, but they cause immense suffering. If they do not shorten life (as a matter of fact, they figure indirectly in death rate statistics) these diseases impede the attainment of the desired growth of the expectancy of life, disabling people early and mutilating their lives. Diseases causing prolonged physical and mental weakness undermine people's health and capacity for work and are causes of poverty and suffering. These diseases may be much more significant than some killer diseases. The British scientist John Stamp writes that hardly anybody dies of caries, catarrh or the common cold, but these diseases collect an abundant tribute from the human species, hindering its happiness and reducing its capacity for work. A much higher tribute is taken by mental and some other diseases of civilisation.

In the case of some diseases the situation has, as we have already noted, deteriorated with the growth of towns, with congestion, with people's isolation from nature and

with the noxious effects of the waste of industry and transport. Attention is drawn to industrial accidents and to the growth of the number of accidents in everyday life. The spotlight is justifiably directed on the diseases in capitalist society linked with the state of the spirit and on the factors that pathologically affect this state.

Plague has been eradicated, but drug-addiction is reaching fantastic proportions in capitalist society. There are magnificent clinics, but alcoholism and occupational diseases are spreading. We are on the threshold of defeating tuberculosis, but half of the total number of hospital beds in Britain and the USA, for example, are occupied by people suffering from one form of mental disorder or another (chiefly schizophrenia and maniac-depressive psychosis), while a great number of people suffer from emotional disorders, various chronic neuroses, insomnia and heightened irritability. The myocardial infarction rate has gone up, and many diseases have rejuvenated. In capitalist society a destructive role is played by people's lack of interest in their work, by their growing discontent with life as a whole. Countless volumes have been written about loneliness in capitalist society, the harmful effects of social atomism on health, the lack of communication between people, the growing bureaucratisation of more and more aspects of vital activity, and sexual permissiveness. The death rate has dropped, but the number of suicides is rising in capitalist society. While apathy, unbearable boredom, endless fatigue and accumulating irritability resulting from exhausting work, fears and conflicts do not directly lead to disease, they in any case sharply increase the chances that people's health will be impaired.

How does the sense of contentedness visualise the way out of this far from bright health situation? It is precisely here, where one must pass from a simple statement of facts to an analysis of their causes, to assessments and forecasts, that the social essence of the sense of contentedness is brought most fully to light. The term "sense of contentedness" characterises not simply a voluntary or involuntary acceptance of alienated bourgeois reality, a way of reconciliation with it (it may, after all, also be purely external or even compulsive), but also satisfaction with that reality.

The sense of contentedness quite naturally, therefore, considers that the causes of civilisation's diseases can be easily separated from civilisation—from bourgeois civilisation, of course. A number of reforms are planned to remove these causes while leaving—and this is the main thing—capitalism's social structure untouched. In other words, the conclusion drawn by the sense of contentedness is that under capitalism it is possible to maintain society at the maximum level of health. From this angle medicine and health protection are regarded almost as a universal saviour from all evils and vices. They determine the character of the reforms designed to improve the social and psychological environment, and they find the means of adaptation to that environment, produce tranquillisers, and so forth. Whitesmocked reformers are allegedly able to integrate the individual in capitalist society and create an euphoria—a happy, tranquil and confident life, without irritability and protests, a life in which each person will willingly perform the role prescribed for him and avoid conflicts.

It is preached that with the aid of the medical technocracy it is even possible to adapt the nervous system to local wars, the nuclear threat, the growing bureaucracy and alienated labour. It is said that the standard of hygiene can be raised by persuading the powers that be that it is in their interest to spend more on hygiene than on military preparations and the apparatus of suppression. Of course, there is a humanistic aspect in the demands for a higher standard of hygiene, as in the above-mentioned demands for the modernisation of towns. But in the approach to these demands, in their isolation from the problems of a fundamental social restructuring of capitalism, as is being done by the champions of medical technocracy, the accent is placed not on humanism but on social demagoguery.

Small wonder that people say it is easier to build castles in the air than to destroy them. The sugared hopes of remaking the world in accordance with the recipes of medical reformers, recipes that are successfully put over to the sense of contentedness and become part of its ideology, are forts preventing the remaking of reality. It is quite apparent that state-monopoly capitalism's economic and political interests and the administrative acts conforming to these



interests took and will continue to take medical recommendations least into consideration. The possibilities for action are limited also in the sphere of hygiene. Although tranquillisers are evidence of scientific advancement they cannot by themselves avert the tragedy of capitalism, develop a taste for life and create an euphoria on the basis of health and happiness. Disharmonious society cannot mould a harmonious, healthy individual.

### Anti-Utopia of Neohedonism

Whereas in its encounters with the dangers we have mentioned the sense of contentedness manages to find means for more solid self-assertion (albeit in its own eyes), in the question of the threat of neohedonism it fears itself. This is not accidental, because in neohedonism, i.e., the summit of refined consumer psychology, it sees its ideal. But the attainment of this ideal does not promise any gratification.

The following gloomy prospect is drawn of the future of mankind. Machines will satisfy basic material requirements, freeing man from labour, and, it is stated, one fine day man will find himself simply redundant. He will then, as a professional idler, engage solely in pleasure-seeking and consumption. This activity will gradually strike at and destroy man's finest qualities, above all his energy. Indolence and stupidity will overcome man, who will pine away from inaction in a world of servile automatons and mechanised comfort, and he will degenerate into a pitiful sybarite, a dependant of machines.

These problems are dealt with in one way or another by many science-fiction writers, who have created so-called anti-utopias, novels serving as warnings (as distinct from the terrifying fantasies of George Orwell). For instance, the menace of neohedonism projected into the future is eloquently shown in *Return From the Stars*, a novel by the noted Polish author Stanislaw Lem. His personages return to earth from a long space journey and find striking changes: social distinctions, conflicts and wars are a distant memory. Man is pampered by machines: obedient and obliging, they watch over him. Thanks to social changes and to

scientific progress, which had eradicated aggressive instincts in man and made acts of brutality and violence impossible, life has been delivered from fear, doubts, distrust and diseases. This is akin to an earthly paradise founded on developed technology. Social equality and finely balanced harmony have become the highest good. Everything serves people reliably and faithfully. Not only dangers but even dramatic situations have been ruled out. Importance is attached only to the satisfaction of refined requirements.

But deliverance from work, cares and aspirations has made people's lives meaningless. The most profound passions are sacrificed to enjoyment and comfort. Love has become inconsequential, and ideals and dreams have vanished—everything has been achieved. The spirit of rebellion, the Promethean fire of daring are not needed. Duty has lost its sternness, and the torments of conscience have become an anachronism—there is no use for moral values in a paradise. Where trials and difficulties, the bitterness of defeat and the realisation of hopes are non-existent, there are neither happiness, nor dignity nor meaning in life. In short, the world of these people has become ideal in the odious Benthamic sense, according to which a respectable society does not need heroes.

*Predatory Things of the Century*, a novel by the brothers A. and B. Strugatsky, contains quite a few symptomatic characteristics of neohedonism. It gives a picture of the possible consequences of man's abandonment of creativity and quests in favour of the cult of pleasure. One of the personages, Doctor of Philosophy Opir, who propounds neohedonism, makes a speech in defence of his views. "We were born in the greatest of epochs, in the epoch of the Gratification of Desires. . . . Love and hunger. Satisfy love and hunger and you will see a happy man. Provided, of course, our man is certain of the morrow. All the utopias of all ages are founded on this most simple of consideration. Deliver man from his anxiety for his daily bread and from his uncertainty of the morrow and he will be truly free and happy. I am profoundly convinced that children, precisely children, are the ideal of mankind. I see the greatest significance in the amazing similarity between a child and a carefree man, the object of a utopia. To

be free of cares is to be happy. And how close we are to that ideal! Within several decades or perhaps even a few years, we shall achieve automatic abundance and shall do away with science as the healed does away with crutches, and all mankind will be a huge happy family of children. . . .

"The day of the pessimist has passed, as has the time of people suffering from tuberculosis, of sex maniacs and the military. As a frame of mind, pessimism is uprooted by that selfsame science. And not only indirectly, through the creation of abundance, but directly, by penetration into the dark world of the subcortex."

Such is the dismal picture drawn by science-fiction writers.

Neohedonism is the ideal cherished by the sense of contentedness and appears to be so realistic that already today it is allegedly beginning to grow into reality, and so significant that it is able to nullify any threat or at least blunt and minimise its impact. It seems that nothing can prevent the realisation of this ideal, especially as it is not merely an eager wish: science and technology are most directly the basis for its proliferation. This is how one side of the matter is presented.

But brought to its logical conclusion, neohedonism catastrophically affects mankind's destinies. Indeed, if, as Opir says, pessimism is combated by direct intervention into the world of the subcortex, by manipulation from without, it is obvious that the sense of contentedness will be destroyed from within. If I am entirely manipulated, this will leave no room for any attitude of my own to the world and to life. Consequently, there is no sense in asking: Am I satisfied with life, with the world order? There is no hint of anything ideal in the neohedonistic ideal. It is rather the other way round: it is hollow, anti-historical and fundamentally non-heroic. The sense of contentedness thus projects its destiny in neohedonism.

The dilemma confronting the sense of contentedness is: either to choose a grotesque and intrinsically dangerous ideal or altogether to abandon the quest for an ideal. Both the one and the other are disastrous. They therefore look for a hybrid, for a mean that it would be blasphemous to call golden. The "ideal" and the simultaneous salvation

from it are concentrated in moderation, which only provides further evidence that the sense of contentedness is meagre in theory and helpless in practice.

### THE SENSE OF CONTENTEDNESS AND SOCIAL REFORMISM

Having briefly examined some of civilisation's threats, let us go over to the second, socio-political, range of problems in the set of anxieties—to the most disquieting area for the sense of contentedness, an area in which it most frequently loses its self-control. In this area it endeavours to fence itself off from political storms with an armour of loyalty, of approved ideals and standards. But in our dynamic age with its volcanic social upheavals these problems make themselves felt every day. Which of them disrupt tranquillity most of all, sap energy and instil fear?

As a preliminary it must be noted that the sense of contentedness is sometimes not averse to lay it on thick. But, as we shall now see, the gloomiest admissions are made in a spirit which always leaves room for a happy ending. In characterising how the sense of contentedness interprets social anxieties we cannot help recalling the sarcasm of Voltaire's words, when he said "that the more private misfortunes there are, the whole is the better". A suspicious attitude to social problems is by no means dictated by cognitive, much less by altruistic, interests. Things are much more simple: the sense of contentedness reacts quickly to anything that may so much as even brush its material foundation.

However, the economy of the capitalist world gives more than enough reason for anxiety. Even the much-trumpeted economic booms cannot end unemployment (among white-collar workers as well), halt the rising prices of necessities, avert the growth of public debts, relax the pressure of taxation and solve the housing problem. Inflation continues unabated. The richest capitalist countries have been unable to wipe out poverty, concealed and open hunger, root out slums and effectively solve the problem of pensions. Anxiety is aroused by the chaotic operations on the stock ex-

change, the monetary crises, the sweat system of labour, the growth of debts on consumer credits and the brutal competition.

The sense of contentedness cannot help seeing that in the capitalist system the class struggle is not dying down: economic disorder is aggravating the social conflicts. Pressure from the bureaucracy is becoming unbearable. The arms race, the unceasing local wars, the expansion of the military-industrial complex, the eruptions of racism and semi-fascist tendencies are arousing apprehensions and fear. Social disorganisation of all kinds is making itself felt every minute. The vices of the capitalist system are much too glaring to be unnoticed. Exposures appear even in the servile bourgeois press.

How then does the sense of contentedness, which itself experiences the consequences of these anxieties, manage to be true to its platform? This would have been a paradoxical question had we lost sight of the fact that being unreservedly bourgeois it does not and cannot in its analysis get to the actual causes and factors giving rise to the above-mentioned social processes. Despite its empirical keenness, the sense of contentedness is unable to appreciate the entire volume of anxieties and suffering that life under state-monopoly capitalism brings the working people. Besides, it does not wish to look behind the façade of that system, confining itself to viewing the coloured stage props where everything appears to be more or less dignified.

Let us assume, however, that having finally brought everything into focus the sense of contentedness more or less accurately records all the manifestations of anxiety and suffering. This would bring it to the decisive phase, namely, the interpretation of what it has seen. This is precisely where it proves to be entirely in the grip of the optimistic official myths about the origin, scale and, above all, nature of social suffering and the ways and means of eliminating it. These myths are permeated through and through with unbounded faith in the bourgeois economic and socio-political system, with the belief that its potentialities are inexhaustible. They spring from the postulate that these factors are survivals and, by and large, non-obligatory, accidental, in other words, that they are not implicit in the

given system. But what are they survivals of? Of capitalism, the myths conscientiously reply, but of the capitalism that has receded into the past, of the capitalism with inadequately developed productive forces and limited social wealth, with primitive management of production and social processes. The myth-makers of the sense of contentedness assert (with the secret hope that their "scholarly impartiality" will be properly appreciated) that Karl Marx had accurately indicated the consequence of uncontrolled capitalist economy. But in the past 100 years a series of spontaneous transformations has allegedly taken place in this chaotically developing economy: capitalist society has entered a new phase of development. Today capitalist society is simply a technical civilisation, an industrial society or, to use the latest terminology, a post-industrial civilisation, a technotronic society, a super-industrial society.

Regardless of the preferred name, this society, we are told, is in principle a harmoniously balanced organism. It is characterised by deeply echeloned industrialisation that is going over to the phase of automation, unparalleled labour productivity and high consumer standards. True, it is admitted that in this society there are still elements of private enterprise and, consequently, of social inequality, but they are used for the general weal as stimulants of the economy, while chaotic development and self-interest are curbed by state regulation founded on the nationalisation of some key industries, on a system of crediting, on the centralisation of huge funds in state budgets, on a special tax policy, and so forth. Indicative (as distinct from directive) planning will beyond doubt produce the ways and means of ending unemployment and economic instability. In the opinion of the sense of contentedness the "social symmetry" between labour and capital will yield fabulous dividends: surplus labour power will be absorbed by the fantastically huge market in the services sphere, while labour monotony and tedium will be abolished by internal humanisation of production and with the aid of technical aesthetics. The absence of incentives will be surmounted by a system of participation in profits and "democratic" planning. The industrial accident rate will be brought down by incorruptible state inspection. The currency discords will be settled by

interstate compromises. Government building projects will make an end of slums. The high cost of medical attendance will be offset by a flexible combination of private and municipal health services. The dying regions will be reanimated by new investments. And so on and so forth.

In the case of private ownership, the assurance is given that it has already become largely a symbol as a result of the division of the function of ownership and management. Power has allegedly passed from owners to managerial experts—technocrats, managers, “social engineers”—impelled not by ideological, egoistic motivations but by the common good, by the interests of technological progress; arbitrary rule by them is reliably precluded by “industrial democracy”.

In industrial society the class and ideological struggles are allegedly dying down with the growth of the middle class, the incomes revolution and the enhanced social mobility. Where conflicts flare up their roots, the sense of contentedness believes, must be sought not in the sphere of social structures but in the shortcomings in labour legislation, in breaches of “administrative ethics”, of the “ethics of business”. The social groups that in the past had different and even conflicting interests are now supposedly fusing into a homogeneous mass with a common consciousness and becoming united by “social bulldozing”,\* in other words, the intensive integrational processes will lead to the emergence of a homogeneous society. This society will have a ruling élite but, the sense of contentedness asserts, partnership and equality of social groups will predominate.

All the necessary reforms will allegedly be put into effect by the bureaucratic apparatus; with trustworthy information at its disposal, the science of management will ensure the uninterrupted efficient operation of this apparatus. True, the swift growth of the bourgeois bureaucratic machine is giving rise to the problem that the bureaucrats and technocrats may usurp power. But the sense of contentedness has taken care of this as well: industrial society, you see, brings democratic management to perfection by means

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\* Margaret Mead, *Culture and Commitment. A Study of the Generation Gap*, New York, 1970, p. 85.

of the election system, by forms of controlling the executive power, and so forth. "Social engineers" and psycho-technicians will work out and introduce new moral standards and rules that will open up unlimited possibilities for regulating social processes in the spirit of fetishised efficiency and productivity.

But if this ideal society, this "technocratic paradise" has been created, how is one to explain all that today evokes such serious anxiety and brings people suffering? The sense of contentedness regards this merely as a deviation from norms or accidental miscalculations that, while not setting off the beauty of the achieved social harmony, do not in any case harm it too much. The organisation that has resolved fundamental problems is, we are told, quite capable of coping with minor problems. The main thing is not to lose hope! The greater the loyalty of the individual or of the group to the organisation, the sooner and more fully will these hopes be realised, says the sense of contentedness.

Let us follow the thinking of the sense of contentedness to its logical conclusion. If industrial society's socio-economic foundation offers the most painless ways of rectifying individual miscalculations and provides the incentives for production activity and socially pliant behaviour, while group conflicts evolve into co-operation, political revolutions in this case become anachronistic. It is asserted that capitalist society is now free from social upheavals, "wasteful" revolutions, that only delay the advance towards the ideals of universal satiety and contentedness. Support for the forces of law and order thus gets moral sanction. On the other hand, any spontaneous or organised disaffection, civil disobedience, "undemocratic" opposition are regarded as indisputable evidence of anti-social egoism: people must be content with what is and, especially, with what will be. Disaffection, according to the sense of contentedness, is directed against the social organisation; it is neither more nor less than irresponsibility and threatens stability, law and order, security and the contentment of the majority. The disaffected must be blacklisted. In the drive for unity, says the sense of contentedness, there must be a positive stratification, in other words, dissidents and disaffected people must be quarantined ideologically, psychologically and



organisationally, isolated from the masses, and the masses must be made to regard them as the source of all evil. The institutional use of force, legal acts of violence with the object of suppressing such disaffection are said to be quite normal, justified and reasonable. "Order!" thundered the cannon of Cavaignac, drowning in blood the rising of the Paris workers in June 1848. "Order!" echoes the sense of contentedness more than a century later.

The sense of contentedness magnanimously admits that disaffection may be evoked by bio-psychological reasons. In this case it willingly accepts the theory of cultural backwardness that sees the roots of social disorders in stress, unsatisfied instincts observed only as a result of a gap between the dynamically developing technical civilisation and the adaptability of man's bio-psychological nature, that is hardly able to keep up with it. Evolution has not produced in man the need and ability to curb his atavistic instincts. The disharmony between social development and individual adaptability, which gives no respite and time for adaptation, is allegedly the cause of all mass hysteria and neuroses, nihilism, melancholy and dissoluteness. The "violators" and "deviators" are thus those who simply find it difficult to adapt themselves to present-day conditions and cultural standards. From the standpoint of the sense of contentedness, sociological prophylaxis and certain Freudian manipulations are therefore all that is necessary to remove or allay disaffection. If this disaffection has an ideological undertone, recourse must be had to counter-ideological indoctrination or direct pressure: disaffection will be given a psychological outlet (the possibility to "wear itself out") or denied the possibility of serious social action. First and foremost, of course, communist activity must be suppressed.

We thus get the following prognostic picture of capitalist society. Political and moral conformism will become the absolutely predominant form of consciousness. Dissidence will be eradicated once and for all. Ideological battles will become as outdated as kerosene lamps, barricades and dynastic and religious wars. There will no longer be a Bastille that will have to be taken by assault. There will only be minor differences in views on tactical issues: this will give "independent political thinking" the respectability so

eagerly sought by the downcast wretchedness and stereotype monotony of the political legalism of the sense of contentedness.

In this way does the sense of contentedness explain the modern bourgeois world and itself in it. The means of surmounting the social threats suggested by its myths are founded on an overestimation of the capitalist system's stability. The future is represented merely as an improvement of the functioning of the currently operating system or, more simply, as the perpetuation of capitalism. These myths, which, to quote Hegel, are as dull as the repetition of a trick whose secret is known to everybody, have been considered more or less in detail in Marxist literature. We shall therefore confine ourselves to general remarks.

#### MYTHS OF INDUSTRIAL AND POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY\*

Nobody will today dispute the assertion that capitalism has undergone essential changes during the past 100 years. This is not surprising because "the present society is no solid crystal, but an organism capable of change, and is constantly changing".\*\* One can argue only over the character of these changes. The sense of contentedness hastens to depict them as the self-destruction of capitalism. Marxist criticism, on the other hand, stresses that capitalism's inner essence has not undergone any fundamental changes although "a new social order"\*\*\* has emerged. The term "industrial society", as all its other kindred designations, is merely a pseudonym of modernised capitalism.

References are made to the fact that many enterprises and services have been nationalised. However, nationalisation is of a very limited character and, besides, it has affected

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\* Other terms designating post-industrial society are in circulation in Western literature: post-capitalist (K. E. Boulding, R. Dahrendorf), technotronic (Z. Brzezinski), post-economic (H. Kahn and A. J. Wiener), super-industrial (A. Toffler), technostuctural (J. K. Galbraith), technological (J. Ellul).

\*\* Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1974, p. 21.

\*\*\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 205.

chiefly those industries and services that for various reasons have proved to be more profitable if run jointly, by the entire capitalist class. It would therefore be more correct to call it "etatisation", the transfer of factories to collective capitalist control. But it may be said that the Communists, too, urge etatisation. This is quite true, because it leads, even though partially, to an improvement of working conditions and weakens the position of private capital. But the Communists have never regarded it as the principal aim of their struggle; it was only one of the stages in the general struggle for the overthrow of the power of capital and the establishment of people's control over the state.

Moreover, it is contended that on account of so-called diffusion, i.e., the growth of the number of shareholders, private capitalist property has allegedly become public property. But let us note, first, that the majority of small and medium enterprises are not share-operated. Second, there are no grounds for the argument that capital has been "democratised" because not every holder of shares is a capitalist, an owner of means of production. In order to be a capitalist one must own a large block of shares, otherwise there is nothing to distinguish this "capital" from an account in a savings bank; moreover, this "capital" not only has no fixed credit interest but runs the risk of melting into thin air. For capitalists as such, the shares issued by their enterprises allow them to obtain cheap credit at the expense of the savings of the working people. There are over 100,000 millionaires in the USA. These are the people who, together with smaller proprietors, comprise the ruling class. While adding up to slightly above one per cent of the total number of shareholders, they own more than half the shares and securities. Affiliated with them are the traditional and neo-traditional groups of the middle and petty non-monopoly bourgeoisie, especially those that have close links with the monopolies. For workers, ownership of shares does not open access to production management. Many shares do not even carry with them the right to vote at shareholders' meetings; besides, even if the owner of one or two shares had a vote his voice would get as much attention at such a meeting as the voice of an ant in a herd of trumpeting elephants. The incomes revolution is likewise a myth.

Experts admit that no perceptible changes have taken place in the distribution of incomes for nearly 20 years.\*

But perhaps private ownership has now evolved into a juridical label,\*\* remaining nothing more than an echo of the past, as the House of Lords, and there is no point in accentuating it? Much is being written about this with references to a "managerial revolution", to the growth of managerial functions and of the engineering and managerial personnel in connection with the scientific and technological revolution, and the resultant complication of production and social processes. It is contended that power is passing from the capitalists to the technostructures (to use an expression coined by Galbraith), which is concentrating experience, know-how, information and decision-making in the hands of a collegial management. Does this mean that power has been usurped by a "new class" unpossessed of private property?

Can one draw the conclusion that under pressure of the scientific and technological revolution the axis of conflicts has shifted from the realm of economics to the realm of management, or that power has, without any revolutionary transformations of capitalism's relations of production and its political superstructure, spontaneously shifted along the axis of education and skill to the meritocracy, an estate of scientists and enlightened managers pursuing the objective not of making profits but of meeting social interests, of improving the quality of life? Management is an indispensable component of any process of production and social life. However, it is also a means of exercising power, in this case the power of capital over blue- and white-collar workers at individual enterprises and on the scale of the whole of society. This is ensured through the subordination of the managerial apparatus to the owners of social wealth, who control finances and determine the strategy of production. An important role is played in this by personnel policy. Business leaders, managers and the bureaucratic élite are mostly people from privileged social strata. Most of them re-

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\* See Herman P. Miller, *Rich Man, Poor Man*, New York, 1964, p. 54.

\*\* See D. Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*, New York, 1973, p. 294.

member public welfare only in their public pronouncements. However, in the adoption and execution of decisions they orientate themselves on the economic interests and ideological guidelines of the capitalist class. Although they are formally wage-earners, their actual salary cannot be regarded as the equivalent of their labour power, as remuneration for managerial labour, because it is many times the wage of an average worker, even if we discount bonuses, incomes from shares, expense accounts and other social benefits.

But the management system also employs a huge number of office workers and intellectuals, whose condition hardly differs from that of the factory proletariat. They cannot be lumped together with the technocratic substratum, with the "managerial bourgeoisie", with the "new class" of managers. The majority are wage-earners, whose interests clash with those of the private proprietors. Quite naturally, a growing segment of white-collar workers have relinquished bourgeois preferences and are beginning to support the economic and even political demands of the blue-collar workers. The flexible managerial system gives only some of them the possibility of making a career, while the appropriate ideological manipulation, which counterposes this group to the entire mass of working people, cultivating in it élitarian ideas, group egoism, indifference to social and political problems, subjectively prepares them for hopes of advancement. The price of this career is unconditional acceptance of the bourgeois way of thinking and participation in the ruthless competition.

The sense of contentedness regards management as a purely organisational and technical function. It believes that the important thing is that the factories should produce higher-quality and cheaper goods, that transport should quickly carry freight and passengers, that schools should give children a sound education, that science should go on making discoveries, while government organs should adopt effective decisions. But does all this free management from an ideological orientation? Factories will continue to produce. But what sort of goods will they manufacture? In whose interests will this output be distributed? Who will get the profits? What is the character of labour? Who will direct

production? And then the schools—whom will they educate? Will the education system aggravate the contradictions between the different social groups or will it help to settle these contradictions? Government organs will adopt and enforce decisions, but have decisions ever been passed that have entirely been emancipated and safeguarded from the values and political and moral positions of their makers? One can try to escape from these questions or deliberately distort them calling them philosophical ballast, but this will change nothing. To a certain extent the growth of the bourgeois state machine and the intensive bureaucratisation of life in capitalist society unquestionably spring from the complication of managerial tasks. But the basic motivating strength of these processes is nonetheless linked with tight control of the actions of the working people, the suppression of their initiatives, the stamping out of social protests and efforts to crush the general democratic and socialist movement. The strengthening of the bourgeois state is spearheaded against socialist countries and the national liberation movement. The state machine is active in moulding the bourgeois orientation among the people and the easily guided individual, in spiritual coercion, in bringing massive ideological and psychological pressures to bear on the people in order to give shape to a satellite consciousness.

There is an objective need for improving the organisation of work in industry and the life of society as a whole, for evolving the best possible methods and systems of management, for developing the techniques and psychology of management. To a certain extent managers meet this need. It would be absurd to belittle the role of technical and economic expertise in drawing up, adopting and enforcing decisions. But every society strives not only to promote the growth of labour productivity and the saving of social effort, but also to operate and develop in keeping with the interests of the ruling class and its main aims as expressed in its ideological doctrines. Lenin wrote that "without a correct political approach to the matter the given class will be unable to stay on top, *and, consequently*, will be incapable of solving its *production problem* either".\* Obviously no

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 32, p. 84.

technocratic, managerial "revolution" can remake capitalism's social nature, although a modification of some principles of management creates some hitherto unknown relations and problems (for instance, individual, factional conflicts between managers of the older and the younger generation, between the bureaucracy and the neo-technocrats eager to join the ranks of the ruling oligarchy, between these specialists and career politicians, and so on).

Further, the myths of the sense of contentedness encourage the idealisation of the modern bourgeois state as a sort of supra-class organisation and arbiter between conflicting interests. They inspire the belief that it is able to abolish exploitation, limit and transform private ownership, and make the corporations serve the nation by reforms of the tax and credit policy, social legislation and insurance systems, relying on nationalised industries, the practice of public works, and its direction of scientific research and education. This "superstitious" approach to the state, an approach called *etatist* (or *statist*) in sociology, is nourished by modifications and an expansion of some of the state's functions. The modern bourgeois state energetically interferes in the economy as the official representative of capitalist society. It does its utmost to prevent any aggravation of the contradictions in all links of that society that could disrupt the extended reproduction of monopoly capital, grants credits, invests capital, takes part in programming production, regulates prices, stimulates and directs the demand, ensurse the movement of labour power, trains personnel, and so forth. Here some interests of the capitalists are infringed upon when necessary. However, this is done by no means in the interests of the working masses, but to benefit the super-monopolies at the expense of segments of small and medium entrepreneurs.

The bourgeois state has turned tight the screws of the tax press. But has this made the capitalists any poorer? Of course, not. What the fiscal authorities leave untouched represents formidable sums. Moreover, the corporations are well informed of all the legal and illegal ways of evading taxes with impunity. But even the deducted part of their profits is returned to them in the shape of state subsidies, profitable state contracts, and so forth. Further, the state

frees private capital from investing in non-paying industries vital to general economic development.

There is no doubt about the state's massive economic and administrative measures in the sphere of planning designed to relax the contradiction between the social character of production and private-monopoly ownership, build up an anti-crisis shield, avert economic chaos and anarchy, and soften the operation of spontaneous forces as the inevitable outcome of monopoly enterprise. These are nothing less than a set of adaptive measures of a guidance nature, representing organised supervision of individual enterprises with the aim of helping the monopolies to keep the market situation under close surveillance, ensure a balance between material costs and outlays of time, programme production and forecast scientific and technical changes. The warped admission of the objective need for planning, the elements of planning in the capitalist economy and the palliative nature of the entire guidance system are evidence notably of the maturing material prerequisites of socialism. "The 'proximity' of *such* capitalism to socialism," Lenin wrote, "should serve genuine representatives of the proletariat as an argument proving the proximity, facility, feasibility and urgency of the socialist revolution, and not at all as an argument for tolerating the repudiation of such a revolution and the efforts to make capitalism look more attractive, something which all reformists are trying to do."<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, capitalist planning is a reply to the socialist challenge. With the growth of the socialist countries' share of the world's industrial output the economic problem of growth rates has become a political problem. Without state regulation capitalism cannot join in the economic competition with socialism.

The myths of the sense of contentedness also include the convergence theories, which are a find for it and there is more than meets the eye when they are called the great hope of the 20th century. According to these theories the capitalist and socialist systems are steadily and irreversibly drifting towards each other in the economic, social, political, cultural and everyday spheres. In the long term this convergence

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<sup>2</sup> V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 443.



must result in the appearance of a "tertiary civilisation", i.e., a society of service, and even a "quaternary civilisation", i.e., a society of science and service,\* which will completely synthesise all the distinctions of these two systems. To back up these theories their proponents refer to such convergent indicators as industrialisation, automation of production, economic programming, mathematical methods of economic management, the scientification of all spheres of activity, the swift growth of the number of scientists, urbanisation, the growth of the number of people employed in the services industry and in management, the enhanced social mobility and numerical growth of the student body, the radical changes in the population's professional and age structure, the development of the mass media, and so on. This is an impressive list and the sense of contentedness, which never troubles itself with serious analyses, draws the conclusion: "*Quod erat demonstrandum*".

The recognition that society is in the process of hybridisation necessarily leads to "obvious" conclusions that in somewhat modified form reproduce the basic maxims of the sense of contentedness: the emergence of a mixed society must be fostered in every way; the banners of the ideological struggle must be folded, for that struggle only delays the process; the idea that society must be transformed by revolution on the basis of social equality must be abandoned; the policy of moderate reforms to ensure the smooth functioning of the bureaucratic machine of administration must be supported, and so on.

The sense of contentedness refers to outwardly, formally similar processes taking place in socialist and capitalist societies. This similarity is in some sense inescapable. The scientific and technological revolution, industrialisation and automation have some features in common in the two socio-economic systems. Take, for example, the rapid growth of the urban population, the education level and the services industry. The parallel looks simplest of all in the everyday sphere, where TV sets, refrigerators, transistors and vacuum-cleaners have become commonplace. But in their comparisons the proponents of the convergence theories

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\* Jean Fourastié. *Le grand espoir du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris, 1963, p. 9.

leave out the main thing, namely, the social forms and methods of promoting these processes and the ensuing consequences. This allows them to ignore the relations of production and the superstructure as inconsequential and minor.

The sense of contentedness deliberately misinterprets trends in the capitalist world that testify to the maturing of the material prerequisites of socialism (economic regulation, scientification of production management, and so on), giving them out for changes in the nature of capitalism. On the other hand, it is hypnotised by some of the processes in the socialist world. Take the economic underdevelopment inherited by most of the socialist countries, which were able to embark upon development on their own material basis not at once but after some time spent on accomplishing what capitalist development had been unable to do (industrialisation, wiping out illiteracy, and so on). This created the impression that they were advancing by stages that had already been passed by the industrialised capitalist states. But the sense of contentedness does not wish (or is unable) to discern through this impression the fundamentally different conditions in which technology, science and culture are developing in the socialist world.

Similarly, it interprets modern socio-economic development, primarily the economic reform being put into effect in some socialist countries, in a spirit advantageous to it. It fancies that this reform is restoring diluted capitalism in these countries and thereby signifies a departure from orthodox Marxism. The comprehensive and more consistent application of the socialist principles of economic management based on profound knowledge and utilisation of objective laws (in particular, the enhanced role of profits, operational economic autonomy, credits, material incentives, extension of cost relations, the promotion of local initiative, the development of mathematical methods of economic management) is depicted as a reconstruction of bourgeois relations.

In ideology, too, the sense of contentedness wallows in the same sort of self-deception. During the past two decades the trend in bourgeois sociology has been to unite heterogeneous theories, whose similarity of problems, attitudes and methods allows them to complement and replace each other. This trend, which is, incidentally, not the only one,

creates the impression that there is a universal law in the ideological process. Here again, led astray by outward appearances, the sense of contentedness believes in the possibility of combining bourgeois and Marxist sociology, of their reciprocal cleansing of ideological dogmas, of eliminating the fatal alternative between them, and of their subsequent fusion.

When the sense of contentedness passes from remote and extremely loose prognostication to more realistic ground it finds that in all its essentials the compromise "mixed society" model is the selfsame, slightly modernised state-monopoly capitalism. Under the pretext of high economic efficiency it retains private ownership, enterprise and their accompanying institutions, while the inevitable vices of the system of private (or private-state) enterprise are obscured by non-committal ethical imperatives.

The idea underlying this construction is fundamentally false. The character of actual development is divergent, because, on the one hand, present-day capitalism's contradictions are aggravated and grow acute and, on the other, socialism develops steadily on its own basis, revealing the abyss lying between the effects of the scientific and technological revolution in different socio-economic systems. Under these conditions the convergence summons turns into an ultimatum relative to socialism and into a factor masking all the basic aspects of imperialist policy.

Since the hopes for a voluntary and equitable convergence are equal practically to zero, imperialism leaves hopes of this kind to political simpletons and uses the favoured convergence idea to camouflage its interference in the affairs of socialist countries with the aim of "dismantling communism" and restoring the capitalist order. These intentions are solicitously concealed with talk about building bridges or "humanising" socialism.

While having retained at least an elementary ability to think realistically, the sense of contentedness is thus nonetheless cut off from the "great hope of the 20th century".

Goethe once warned against the delusion that the truth lies between two extreme opinions. We would say that between them lies a problem, in the given case the problem of renouncing the sense of contentedness.

The sense of contentedness is the victim of credulity. It meekly agrees with the claim that the dynamism, the social mobility of the "open society" (yet another pseudonym of "democratic" capitalism!), has reached such a high level that it is time to speak of the disappearance of society's class macrostructure. The stratification and division of people (on account of the differentiation of the multitude of functions and the distinctions in individual capabilities) into groups having basically identical interests are allegedly all that has remained. Since there are no obstacles to the transition from one social compartment to another and since infiltration from the lower to the higher strata proceeds with relative ease, the class-consciousness of the working people and revolutionary eruptions disappear; society's stability and the integration of its various social groups are endlessly consolidated.

Of course, compared with preceding, "traditional" societies, in which man was anchored for life in a definite stratum, capitalism may seem to be a society with free circulation among all the levels of social position. Actually this circulation proceeds on the basis of a bitter and exhausting competition for the right to make one's way in the world, while even advancement is the result of the most scrupulous sifting. The point here is not that the mechanism of social testing and selection is poorly organised and regulated, letting through to the top incompetent or authoritarian leaders. This is assumed by the "critically minded" sense of contentedness, which in fact blindly believes in integration. When it involves certain people from the lower strata, advancement is secured at the price of desertion from one's class. But an entire class cannot be declassed (deproletarianised)! As has been incisively put by an American sociologist, 99.9 per cent of the citizens of the USA have as little chance of becoming the President as 99.9 per cent of the subjects of a monarchy have of becoming a monarch.\*

Bourgeois ideology gives out its cherished wish to mould in the working people a false idea of their own class in-

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\* See Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Mobility*, London, 1964, pp. 153, 154.

terests, a submissive sense of contentedness, for a fact or something that is becoming a fact. Operation "unity" is the strategic ideal of the bourgeoisie. But against the background of the increasing social stratification and the unremitting class struggle, this operation proves to be a fictitious ideal.

All the attempts to channel the energy of the masses from the struggle for their class interests to a struggle for personal advancement, and the desire to see classes disintegrate into competing groups seeking a larger share of the national income and power are inconsistent with the actual trends of social development. An objective analysis lays bare the hollowness of the idea of integration, of halting proletarianisation, of depolarisation, of reconciling labour with capital. On the contrary, it shows the increasing activity and organisation of the masses, the growing prestige of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the strengthening and development of the communist and working-class movement. Although the sense of contentedness is still a mass phenomenon, the basic trend cannot be averted even by the most subtle bourgeois ideological manipulation. The illusory unity of industrial society is counterposed by the strengthening unity of the proletariat, of the working people and the liberated peoples of all countries. Today bourgeois sociology is only able to establish certain social and psychological mechanisms and dependencies and help to settle some conflicts on the level of inner-group relations. But it cannot settle the conflicts between labour and capital, between the militant proletariat and monopoly capitalism. The people's hostility for the aims and motivations of capitalist production and for the entire capitalist organisation cannot be neutralised by preventive sociology and psychoanalytical suggestion.

The assurances that the era of ideologies and social revolutions is on the decline are beneath criticism. The revolutions may even be "attributed" to explosions of energy caused by fluctuations in solar activity, by mass hysteria or accidental miscalculations. People opposed to consumer society may be stigmatised, likened to Luddites or anarchists, regarded as unstable, convulsive, intolerant or simply romantics. One may endlessly urge for a "saving" on

revolutions with the plea that they disrupt the smooth, normal course of social development, destroy productive forces and waste social energy. But one cannot name a single major progressive event during the past sixty years that does not in one way or another bear the imprint of the great liberative storm introduced by the October Revolution in 1917. Far from making political revolutions unnecessary, scientific, technological and social development in the capitalist world creates situations, impasses and paradoxes from which the anti-monopoly revolution is the only way out.

The stance of the sense of contentedness becomes even more tangled and precarious when it tries to attribute all social vices to moral degradation. It has an intimate knowledge of the latter's symptoms because for the most part its judgment of them is based on its own experience, on inside information. This experience tells it that consumer-cult interests, which supersede moral inducements in the role of guiding principles of behaviour, underlie the crisis. It believes that to rejuvenate society it is enough to surmount the moral crisis: all its social imperfections will at first ease off and then disappear entirely. But this is exactly where the paradox begins. Is it not strange that society's "normal functioning" engenders the social factors of moral degeneration? Considered as ideal by the sense of contentedness, the bourgeois organisation itself blesses the consumer orientation in its own development, stimulates ruthless economic competition, gives rise to the struggle for power and prestige, squeezes the activity of people into formalised bureaucratic systems, and generates racial problems, the "demonism" of technology, uncontrolled urbanisation, and so forth, which directly or indirectly lead to moral degradation.

The sense of contentedness regards the perfection of those factors and institutions of the bourgeois organisation that produce the crisis as the way to achieving moral rejuvenation. But the more intensively these factors and institutions operate, the more pronounced moral vices become. An ugly infiniteness of causes and effects looms before the sense of contentedness in the shape of a problem that cannot be coherently explained. In order to extricate itself from this impasse the only line of action open to it is to turn to historical experience, in the light of which the present mor-

al degradation allegedly has the appearance of an inevitable flaw of the idealised private-property organisation.

Indeed, although history has been painted red with blood, the humanisation of relations is still taking place. In listing the lines of humanisation, progress is named in the attitude to children, the sick, cripples and aged people. Attention is drawn to the emancipation of women, the almost total disappearance of blood feuds, the eradication of prejudices towards some professions, the condemnation of torture, which had once been regarded as the common way of obtaining information, the abolition of corporal punishment, without which education could not be conceived, the increasing toleration of dissidence, the ability to settle conflicts in a spirit of understanding, and much else.

Lenin emphatically denounced this approach to the complex dialectics of moral development. He caustically ridiculed the trivial arguments of the German positivist Joseph Petzoldt, who contended that mankind was smoothly evolving into a "perfect state of stability". Indications of this evolution were seen in the "restraint of radicals", the decrease in the returns on capital, the rise of wages, the improvement of the condition of the wage worker; a slave's leg could once be broken with impunity, but now ... he who has eyes will see!\*

This mode of understanding and substantiating moral progress conforms perfectly with the logic of the sense of contentedness. For the latter it is enough to freshen up the facts in the Petzoldt pattern. Why then cannot the relaxation of morals, the abatement of cruelty, as a result of cultural growth and the increased safety of existence, be regarded as an argument in favour of the sense of contentedness? For the simple reason that moral dynamics do not permit us to believe in the "automatism of history". Let us recall the gruesome moral effects of the collapse of primitive society. The base interests, dirty aims and odious means that had undermined the tribal system with the development of class society are by no means fading. Despite the notions of the sense of contentedness with its vain pride, the relaxation of morals is an extremely contradictory pro-

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\* See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 14, pp. 319-21.

cess. Man's value as an individual and the humanity of relations have unquestionably risen. But exploitation and alienation with all their anti-human consequences grew simultaneously despite official optimism. The simplified pattern of evolutionism has no room for fascism with its concentration camps and gas chambers, Hiroshima, neocolonialist oppression, racism, bureaucratic tyranny, egoism, corruption, drug-addiction, and much else.

Thus, relative to moral progress none of the evidence presented by the sense of contentedness holds any water. There is nothing left to it save either to resort to the favourite argument of anti-intellectualism—I believe because this is absurd—or to call in (time without number!) the unfailing and seemingly reliable slogan of moderation. Moral moderation and a "strong hand" are what will allegedly weed out the social and moral vices (the selfsame inevitable flaws) of capitalist society. Given all its ostentatious love for democracy, the sense of contentedness does not, under certain historical conditions, by any means regard authoritarian and chauvinistic trends as alien to it.

Remaining true to itself, it cannot and does not desire to see true hopes and prospects. Essentially bourgeois, it is made up to regard communism and its realisation in the socialist world as the greatest menace to civilisation, as the most diabolic obsession of the century. For that reason on the level of internal policy the sense of contentedness directly or indirectly places its trust in anti-communism of all varieties, while on the international scene it approves the calls for cold war, militarisation, the arms race (frequently sharing in the resultant economic benefits) and military pressure, regarding this as the best guarantee of the conservation of the social relations in which it itself germinates.

But it has come up against trials that were unknown to its forerunners. In it the attitude to communism is, above all, an attitude to a word nuclear war. Even with its inclination for hard-voiced bravado, it does not find it very easy to arrive at an acceptable compromise between the fundamental point of its credo of a fine present and a finer future and its antipode, the nuclear threat. Its stance is purely anti-communist. But since it has to live in a world where



the will of anti-communism is not the sole law, it has, albeit partially, become aware of the strength of retaliation and suddenly finds in itself peaceful aspirations, which clearly lay bare its fragmentation and inner contradiction.

The sense of contentedness asserts its golden mean not in support of détente, not in the struggle to avert a nuclear catastrophe and make the principles of peaceful coexistence a standard of relations in the community of nations, but on the basis of attempts to return this community to the cold war years. To avoid mutual extermination people must pay a tribute to the least evil, the alternative allegedly being only the following: a peace safeguarded by the threat of force, a peace on the brink of war, going down to but never reaching the sinister precipice. Implicit in this theory is the surmise that a military impasse will make the struggle to change the social system likewise senseless. It is contended that having run into the world's fatal political structure the class struggle will inevitably die down.

The balance of fear concept appeals to the experience of history: nobody, it is said, has yet started a war in the knowledge that retaliation is inescapable. However, this reference is untenable if only for the reason that there has never been a situation with a nuclear impasse. In addition to the fact that the endless arms race drains economic resources, it continuously (due to an actual or supposed disturbance of the balance) harbours the threat of a military explosion. Besides, the possibility of imperialism starting a "war of desperation" must not be discounted either. The very situation of nuclear terrorisation, the whipping up of fear and mutual distrust leads to grave political and moral consequences. From the vicious theory of balance of fear the criminal conclusion is drawn that war itself fought with nuclear weapons and confined to certain limits may serve as a means of achieving political aims.

Such are the "indisputable truths" propounded by the sense of contentedness. It hopes that they will help it to remove the despondency springing from the fears we have discussed. However, this is nothing more than a speculative illusion giving superficial satisfaction and flimsy hopes, in other words, self-comfort derived from apologetic thinking and an adaptive way of life.

As we have shown, the sense of contentedness is an essentially reformist consciousness. The mystic philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev once wrote that the individual reforms put into effect in capitalist society will continue mending its holes until the social tissue becomes new.\* On this score Georgi Plekhanov pointed out that capitalism was established not by mending the holes of the feudal system but as a result of that system's overthrow by revolution. The same fate awaits capitalism. However much stockings are mended they remain stockings; they do not become gloves even if their entire tissue is renewed.

In effect, the sense of contentedness does not offer solutions for its range of fears, but only tries to fence itself off from them. It has as much grounds for being contented, for being optimistic as a person condemned to death.

### ANARCHO-HEDONISM

Our examination of the evolution of the sense of contentedness will be incomplete if we say nothing about sublimed cult of consumption, which is one of its varieties. The ideal inspiring and orienting this cult may be called anarcho-hedonism, which draws its proponents mainly from the easily "Bohemianised" segment of students and declassed intellectuals, people finding themselves knocked out.

Unlike vulgar, prosaic consumer psychology, anarcho-hedonism does not abide by the guidelines of official bourgeois ideology and morals with their illusions, norms, symbols and career standards. It does not subscribe to the battered moral "respectability", does not eulogise the doubtful advantages of the "golden mean" and is not preoccupied with quests to justify time-serving. But God forbid that an anti-consumer psychology is attributed to it on these grounds. Everything is quite the reverse: this ideal embodies consumer psychology with the maximum consistency, bringing it to *nec plus ultra*. It is not merely a substitution for the commonplace consumer psychology, but its logical consummation and one of its potential forms. The

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\* See Nikolai Berdyaev, *Subjectivism and Individualism in Social Philosophy*, St. Petersburg, 1901, p. 260 (in Russian).

usual consumer morality proves to be only unfolded anarcho-hedonistic morality. We are here confronted, to quote the apt remark by the Soviet sociologist Y. N. Davydov, with a refined variant of the cult of consumption that has managed to convert the most trivial striving for entertainment and sensual pleasure into a quivering and frenzied belief in the divinity of any delight, appearing before the amazed world with its mystical core and esoteric cult.\*

What is the life-blood of this neohedonistic mysticism? In what spheres does it wander and on what does it rest? The philosophy of super-consumption does not descend to such "trifles" as the distinctions between the two opposing worlds—capitalism and socialism, with the result that these terms are themselves artificially converted into hollow abstractions. This speculative operation helps to persuade people that paradise is round the corner, and that if most of the disciples of neohedonistic mysticism were forthwith to give rein to their natural inclination for unlimited enjoyment there could be a paradise immediately. The anarcho-hedonist draws backing for his arguments from the subjective conviction that a situation suitable for a neohedonistic revolution has matured in industrialised countries.

However, the long-established system of moral taboos obstructs the realisation of this utopia's imperatives. This hinders also the adequacy of experiencing enjoyment, limits free access to new spheres of enjoyment and prevents any unregulated pleasure-seeking.

Anarcho-hedonism acknowledges that culture and morals were vital in the remote epoch of low labour productivity and limited intensity of association. But in modern society, which is founded on a formerly inconceivable level of labour productivity and high intensity of association, culture and morals have become fossilised dogmas, conservative survivals. It is these dogmas and survivals and not anybody's economic domination or the machinery of power and suppression that comprise the main force of "repressive society". The sons and daughters of industrial civilisa-

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\* See Y. Davydov, "The Mysticism of Consumer Consciousness". *Uprosy literature*, No. 5, 1973, p. 49.

tion have been accustomed to tame rationalisation and compelled to subordinate their sensuality "voluntarily" to moral prescriptions and dead traditions in exchange for hopes, for guarantees of satiety and security. They have been forced to place duty above happiness, and labour above enjoyment and pleasure. As a result, socialised man is solidly adapted to alienated relations sanctified by productivity, rationalism and discipline. The mythology of anarcho-hedonism is full of normophobia, of anti-cultural zeal. It demands the release of natural instincts and the imagination from the oppression of culture and moral tutelage. It is alleged that social progress should necessarily be directed towards the long-past "golden age", the moral vacuum and permissive society.

However, any negation of norms inevitably leads to negation becoming a norm. This is what is happening to the mythology of anarcho-hedonism. The means of saving mankind suggested by it come forward as a variety of new norms of compulsion, of a new fear of "indecentcy". The system of means of carrying out the programme tasks of this mythology is a loose group of directives, which cannot be qualified as other than anarcho-hedonism as far as the inter-related areas of behaviour and the organising elements of the ideal itself are concerned. To round off the picture let us at least cursorily consider the directives recruited by the ideal.

Most frequently a group of directives is distinguished in the area of sex behaviour. Undeniably, appreciable changes have taken place in this area in our age. They are most fully expressed in the changes of the social status of women, although in bourgeois society there still are various forms of inequality of women and the need, to quote an American sociologist, for a "female rebellion against traditional sex roles and male sexism".\* The European (Christian) sex moral code, which is based on the patriarchal tradition, is undergoing considerable modifications. We are witnessing the crystallisation of Lenin's forecast: "A revo-

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\* Alfred McClung Lee, *Toward Humanist Sociology*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1973, p. 3.

lution in sex and marriage is approaching, corresponding to the proletarian revolution.”\*

In view of capitalism's general crisis the process of innovation in this area is burdened by innumerable deformations (family disorganisation, excessive eroticisation, liberalisation of sex relations, abundance of erotic literature, and so forth). In this contradictory historical situation anarcho-hedonism demands the fulfilment of an ideological super-task, namely, a moratorium on norms in sex relations, the legalisation of free love, of sex freedom. It tries to persuade people that these steps will not only spell out a full-blooded life but enable people to acquire an awareness of their own importance derived from involvement in society's advance to the strategic expanses of new social changes of an allegedly breath-taking scale. In other words, what is taking place is a deliberate and totally immoral exploitation of the above-mentioned deformations, exploitation screened by ultra-Left verbiage that is as shameless as it is irresponsible.

Of course, sex behaviour can be considered in isolation from the other vital activities of people and the essence of morality reduced to chastity solely from the positions of inveterate moral conservatism. As has been justifiably noted by British sociologists who have studied sex morals, the sex preoccupation of a segment of young people is due to the fact that they do not lead a constructive life. Their conflict is with consumer society, which in its denunciations of sex freedom is guided not so much by a concern for the purity of morals as by its desire to save moral conservatism with its demagoguery and “high tariff walls against alien notions”, with its joy that follows “the orgy of denunciation”.\*\*

However, most of the disaffected young people are not opposed to marriage, to the duties of parenthood and to family life. They strive for the purity and equality of the sexes, seeking to surmount dual morals. They do not want “group sex”, “communal marriages”, “hippie-nudism”, “streaker-nudism”, sado-masochist and unisexual love, the

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\* Klara Zetkin, *Reminiscences of Lenin*, London, 1929, p. 57.

\*\* E. and M. Eppel, *Adolescents and Morality*, London, 1966, pp. 8, 12.

disappearance of the values of parenthood, justification of the newly-acquired promiscuity. They do not seek the break-up of obligations. They do not look for a frivolous attitude to intimate relations. They do not wish to give way to any impulse (albeit they sometimes blunder, use means that are inconsistent with their desired goal) under the guise of waging a revolutionary fight against hypocritical bourgeois decorum, Victorian culture and stratified society into which they are provoked by the imperatives of anarcho-hedonism. Youth protests partially mirror the need for the burgeoning of individual love, which is only possible when there are indeed free sex relations, when personal relations are individualised, when these relations are unobscured by attendant and fettering considerations, when hate is surmounted. However, anarcho-hedonism demands the reduction of love to the fancies of eroticism, the depersonalisation and instability of sexual relations, the renunciation of love as a universally recognised value, a return to brute sexual behaviour.

This situation requires additional study in the context of anarcho-hedonistic association. In the ideal we are examining there are demands that at first glance are anti-individualistically orientated, for example, the demand for so-called collectivism. A positive collective is interpreted as an unofficial, unformalised and unstable association. What is meant actually is the herd. Its prototype is the idealised anti-community, the community of nomads. Its goals are sexual freedom and the realisation of an altruistic instinct. If we look through the self-advertising enveloping this sort of collectivism we shall see the demand for the legalisation of obscenity and sexual perversions of all kinds. At the back of this is the striving to assert a new attitude to perversions and experimentation, the argument being that in collective life the problem of sex acquires paramount significance and recognition is accorded only to enjoyment derived without selectivity or spiritual closeness, and the highest points are given to group satiation of worked-up desire.

Collaterally, this sort of collective is designed to kill labour incentives and social activity. On the pretext that modern commercial civilisation exaggerates the outworn

values of labour, it calls for the desocialisation of the individual and opens the way to psychopathological behaviour and the cult of violence, creating unsolvable and tragic contradictions and training reinforcements for criminal elements, Right extremists and anarcho-terrorists.

In this pseudo-collective existence, in this "ladled-out consciousness" it requires very little effort to discard the fetters of responsibility and is subjectively simple to betray cultural and moral values. This "collectivism" involves rituals of "holy" libertinism that facilitates the destruction of the "antiquated" taboos. These rituals spring from certain elements of youth nihilistic sub-culture. We shall distinguish three groups of these elements.

The first are elements of the given sub-culture, which fuse various irrational-mystical principles, ritualistic interpretations of culture and everything that is primitive. This gives rise to an attraction for archaic cultures such as Zen-Buddhism and ancient orgiastic and phallic cults. Out of an assortment of such elements efforts are being made to create a new erotic culture, for the sake of which the collectivist of the anarcho-hedonistic school is already today renouncing traditional European culture. Simultaneously this signifies a renunciation of fundamental moral values contemptuously called "conventional morals". The anarcho-collectivist, with his claims to becoming a new "natural", asocial man, attacks culture for its teaching of restraint in the satisfaction of instincts, of readiness to rest content with delayed and, therefore, allegedly diluted enjoyment. From his position of "civilised barbarity" this collectivist seeks to discredit all the social institutions of culture and its norms as synonyms of alienation and non-freedom. By his unfounded substitution of the cause and effect dependence between the social structure and culture, and also morals, he separates the changes in human activity from the changes in the circumstances of this activity, divorces the revolution in the make-up of the individual from revolution as the socio-economic and political reorganisation of society.

Second, a ritualistic significance is imparted to some orientations of neo-avant-gardism. Every art is capable of

performing a hedonistic function. But by its nature aesthetic enjoyment is spiritual, although it may extend from katharsis to so-called relaxation that absorbs the earlier aroused excitement by negligible mental effort and moral experience. Ritualised by anarcho-hedonism, art descends from katharsis and relaxation to ecstasy. It endeavours to reduce aesthetic perception from the spiritual level to the level of psycho-physiological enjoyment, to the level of affectation, to a first signal system. Long exposure to this spiritually self-destroying "involving art" must help to erase traces of "dead culture" from the consciousness.\* It is only by stretching a point that in this dehumanising art one can discern a sort of negative reaction to the drabness, inexpressiveness and featurelessness of mass culture, which turns the individual into an anonymous and standard consumer, for it deepens the lack of individualism, assessing it not as a vice but as valour meriting elevation to the rank of an ideal.

This art is expected to modify the obsolete balance of sensations, to bring to light new, unknown and extravagant spheres of enjoyment. It is expected to bring total emancipation to the consciousness of the individual, to bring inner release from the "sticky" embrace of culture and morals.

The third group of "collectivism's" rituals is linked with individual and group drug-addiction. It is not simply a matter of drug dependence, abuse of anti-fatigue drugs, of soporifics and tranquillisers (barbiturates, etc.), but of drug-addiction pure and simple. This concerns not its victims but its adepts. The use of traditional narcotics or

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\* It must be noted that surrealism, which propounds the "counter-ethic" of arbitrariness, eulogises sadistic mysteries and the liberation of the depersonalised element, and preaches the replacement of the moral law by the law of the untamed instinct, by the imperative of breaking the ten commandments, and spontaneity, is a typical representative of the art serving anarcho-hedonistic precepts.

But it should be borne in mind that not every "twilight" decadent art is linked with anarcho-hedonistic behaviour. Some schools of present-day modernism are not conditional upon such behaviour. For instance, a cogent political folklore with strong undertones of democracy and independence is disseminated by singers, musicians and poets such as Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, Elton John and John Lennon.



those that have been produced by the latest psycho-pharmacology pursues the aim of opening the sluice-gates to freedom of enjoyment and thus itself becoming intense enjoyment, an activator of eroticism. Naturally, in view of anarcho-hedonism's evangelistic claims, both these unseemly aims are heavily screened by ultra-moral justifications. In group drug-addiction it finds a "new holiness", an instrument for "collectivist" unity and universal love, a means of deposing bourgeois individualism: in the individual caught on these somnambulistic waves, not only the willingness but also the ability to identify himself with other human beings and generally regard himself as an individual are atrophied. The ability of the drug-addict to step easily across the moral bans relativised in advance is regarded as evidence of the revolutionary significance of mass drug-addiction, which thus gets the mission of bringing freedom into the whole of human culture.

Such, in brief, is the content of anarcho-hedonism's basic guidelines. By and large, the material premises of this ideal may be characterised as the fetishisation of the changes wrought in the correlation between labour and enjoyment under the impact of the scientific and technological revolution. The conflict between antagonistic classes is leading to dualism in the moral of asceticism and the moral of hedonism. Whereas the former proclaimed as morally worthy only what the individual must do regardless of the vacillations of his desire, the latter regards as valuable only what the individual desires, regardless of what he is obliged to do. This dualism is inevitable when labour is alienated, when labour is separated from and counterposed to enjoyment, when enjoyment mostly follows labour in time and in space. (For that reason, let us note in parenthesis, the elements, the "splashes" of anarcho-hedonism, of its specific attitude and cult, took shape by degrees and have a fairly long tradition in the history of anarchism and extreme individualism from antiquity to Marquis de Sade.) "The pleasures of all hitherto existing estates and classes had to be either childish, exhausting or crude, because they were always completely divorced from the vital activity, the real content of the life of the individuals, and more or less reduced to imparting an illusory content to a meaningless

activity."<sup>\*</sup> This situation, in general outline, remains under modern capitalism as well, despite the rapid growth of social wealth, requirements and enjoyments.

But mesmerised by the alienation of labour, the anarcho-hedonistic immoral consciousness continuously curses labour generally in any of its forms and manifestations. It imagines that the species essence of man is constantly negated in labour, that man was created and continues to be created by enjoyment outside labour, by trifling and aimless activity, and that the attainment of a state of irresponsible, morally uncontrolled enjoyment brings man into kinship with everything living. The "revolution", with which the hopes pinned on this consciousness are linked, may without exaggeration be called an anti-labour revolution of social parasitism. This consciousness, which declares "let highly productive society do the paying", cannot understand that as a mandatory condition of finding enjoyment and as a vital material basis of enjoyment, the individual's capacity for pleasure takes shape precisely in labour—productive and non-productive. Creative labour is itself the highest enjoyment, free play of physical and intellectual forces, remaining purposeful, utilitarian activity. It is precisely here that an impetus is given to speeding up that evolution in the style of life which the Polish sociologist Bogdan Suchodolski formulated as a "quest by man of new attractions in life".<sup>\*\*</sup>

Further, it must be noted that anarcho-hedonism's bent for integrating elements of diverse archaic cultures likewise rests on the reality of the increased cultural interaction fostered, in particular, by upheavals in the sphere of mass information. On the whole, the assimilation of the moral ideals and values that matured in preceding or coexistent but separated cultures is a progressive development provided, of course, this integration is selective and proceeds on the basis of progressive criteria.<sup>\*\*\*</sup> But anarcho-

\* Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, pp. 442-43.

\*\* *Proceedings of the 25th World Congress of Philosophy*, Sofia, 1973, pp. 233-34.

\*\*\* The limited but nonetheless productive possibility of the humanist synthesis of the ethical heritage drawn from separated cultural regions was shown by Albert Schweitzer in *Kultur und Ethik*, München, 1923.

hedonism adopts the stance of an apologist of all archaic cultures, frenziedly picking up what had been cast off by various reactionary ideas. The choice in favour of mysticism is, for its part, not only an understandable reaction to the general complication of the volume and structure of the fund of culture but also the result of distrust for the variety of rationalism flourishing in the modern bourgeois world, a distrust that has assumed the form of total cultural nihilism.

As for "collectivism", it is a perverted reaction to the dominance of bourgeois pseudo-collectivism and bureaucracy, to the accentuated normative character of bourgeois organisation. Under capitalism alienation grows steeply in huge industrial, managerial, educational and consumer organisations. The object of depersonalised suppression, manipulation and levelling looks for compensation and frequently finds a safety-valve in the sex "industry" and in herd "collectivism" which fosters that industry. The weakening of the traditional means of socialising young people with the help of the family, the church community and "local associations", with the enhancement of the role of the mass media in the socialisation process, is making itself felt in the bourgeois world today. This system of information brims with material that depicts modern life as endless enjoyment and pleasure, stimulating anarcho-hedonistic behaviour and the corresponding views (that life is a carnival, the counterposing of labour to enjoyment, the encouragement of a Bohemian jargon, the worship of pathological cruelty, and so on).

To close our examination of the material sources of the anarcho-hedonistic sub-mass consciousness, it must be emphasised that to some extent the ruling class (which, of course, takes the corresponding ideological and organisational steps in that direction) is interested in its dissemination and influence. However, to ascertain the social significance of anarcho-hedonism, it is far from enough to point to the correlation between this particular form of consumption and the market requirements of state-monopoly capitalism. It is quite apparent that the alleged anti-bourgeois character of anarcho-hedonism is illusory. But this illusoriness is not entirely bereft of content. The fact is

that in a limited sense the proclaimed aim is pursued seriously and with considerable vigour. But the actual target of its critical attacks is not the bourgeois spirit as such but the "classical forms" of bourgeois decorum and morals.

These morals embrace a definite system of stereotype values, value orientations, ritualised forms of behaviour, motivations and sanctions of the bourgeoisie at an earlier, at any rate the pre-imperialist, stage of capitalism's development. They took root and settled in the ascetic ideals of acquisition and accumulation and acquired the inertia of prejudices. The bourgeois system of morals is today moving to a new phase. This has given prominence to the question of the ways and means of destroying the fortifications of traditional, official bourgeois morals. From the standpoint of historicism these changes enable us to understand and assess the functions of anarcho-hedonism. It is quite evident that the ruling class would not have wished anarcho-hedonistic behaviour to acquire a mass character because consumer-coloured extremism harbours the threat of serious social disorganisation and cultural chaos. Besides, the models of such behaviour generally cannot become universal for they are adjusted much too closely to the styles of the youth sub-culture (in which, needless to say, there is still space for the further expansion of this behaviour). The problem lies in settling the conflict between the requirements of the economy of consumer society and the psychological barriers in the consciousness of the mass buyer, barriers reinforced by the ideals of classical bourgeois morals and which it is difficult to break down with the conventional means of market offensives. Anarcho-hedonism is designed precisely as the practical instrument for settling this collision.

Moreover, it has the no less important function of diverting critically-minded young people from the revolutionary movement. The English poet Roy Fuller writes that the bourgeoisie deliberately allows for all-permissiveness in the mass art and in the sphere of mass information because sexual satisfaction weakens political disaffection. This function is facilitated by romanticism, transgressions of official morals, the attractiveness of impermissible pleasures, the illusion of involvement in the epoch, and the

non-ideologised clarity and ideological vagueness of anarcho-hedonism. It constantly seeks to benefit by the striving of young people for immediate action, by their anti-bourgeois feeling, by a false understanding on the part of a section of young people of the correlation between morality and revolutionariness.

Anarcho-hedonism has no features of anti-consumption and it does not call upon its supporters to achieve martyrdom or win the questionable "right" to wretchedness. It has no lasting hostility for social vanity and the ethics of business. It protects social vanity against destructive criticism, keeps it in reserve for the future, shows a convenient way of directing the criticism of young people into a channel that does not jeopardise state-monopoly capitalism and indicates how to adapt the individual to the conditions of life in bourgeois society even at the price of destroying him through the acquisition of criminal tendencies. "Revolutionaries" orientated on bourgeois consumer morals become "rascally businessmen" (Dostoyevsky), while the patterns of anarcho-hedonistic behaviour are quite easily integrated with mass culture.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SENSE OF WRETCHEDNESS

*There was a dachshund, once so long  
He hadn't any notion  
How long it took to notify  
His tail of his emotion;  
And so it happened, while his eyes  
Were filled with woe and sadness,  
His little tail went wagging on  
Because of previous gladness.*

UNKNOWN POET

#### AT A CROSSROADS

The sense of contentedness is opposed—as would seem to be natural—by a sense of wretchedness. But are they really antipodes? Perhaps “contentedness” is only a veil, a mask, a frozen smile, a role impeccably performed? Do we not here encounter a colossal and skilfully concealed mystification?

These questions are by no means intended to question the objective existence of the sense of contentedness. The question of the authenticity of these two phenomena arises only because the sense of contentedness is an incomplete, partial reflection of the direct vital practice of its innumerable and very different supporters, whose consciousness in everything else is fabricated. The spurious character of the sense of contentedness is brought to light in the realisation of its own ideals in life. It is no simple matter to hurdle the barrier separating the mass adherent of these ideals from success. Most of the claimants have to rest content with partial successes or even simply the external appurtenances and symbols of prosperity. Although this majority has been drilled to believe that one can only blame oneself for non-success (failure to get on the bus carrying people from the foothills of success to its summit is due solely to one's own sluggishness, lack of initiative, inability to reorientate oneself morally and ideologically with the necessary speed and efficacy, and so forth), the comfort derived from consolation of this kind steadily wears thin.

But the ordinary proponent of neohedonism is no analyst and events have never brought him round to profound theo-

retical meditation. The sense of contentedness is much too sensitive for this. No, not to the misfortunes of others. Individually orientated, it can open itself to the perception of the grief and collapse of hopes of others only on the basis of its own experience. The readiness to endure difficulties and privation springs solely from profound, humanistic convictions. But these are the convictions that the sense of contentedness does not possess. It is not interested in fortitude. Life, it feels, is much too short for long and hopeless patience. Prey to consumer complications, to the thought that a mistaken step had been taken in life, it is tormented by fear for society's present and future, a society dominated by contentedness. It is worried that it seeks comfort in a miracle which it does not believe will occur.

However, this should not be oversimplified, depicted as though the sense of contentedness has only one motivation for self-criticism, namely, the unrealisability of hopes, in the same way as, say, unhappiness comes to the door not only of those who are undernourished, have not enough sleep and wear themselves out physically. The index of consumption can be correlated to the index of happiness only very approximately. Moreover, the extension of the range of requirements under capitalism, particularly higher, social requirements, relatively expands also the volume of discontent threatening the sense of contentedness. Properly speaking, the designation of the sense of contentedness is precisely to disperse the atmosphere of discontent in capitalist society, inject *joie de vivre* into the climate of universal alienation, assure "happy slavery". For that reason the partial realisation of the hedonistic-consumption ideal in life may prove to be sufficient for this artificially created sense of well-being. Of course, this would be not enough for total authenticity. Nonetheless, it would be a barrier to discontent, to the conversion of contentedness into a mask mystifying the observer.

Contentedness is, however, dispelled not only because the barrier to success proves to be insuperable. And not only because of any lack of adaptive effort, because the need for constant adaptation to consumer society is much too demanding, or because competition requires a great deal of

staying power. Erosion of contentedness begins even when a certain stability of the personal status seems to its exponent to be immutable. More, under certain circumstances the attainment of a relatively high standard of consumption may even facilitate this erosion. In any case, practice shows that the wave of discontent rises without being accompanied (and without being directly affected) by a drop of the level of material security of the adherents of the sense of contentedness, or it may even forestall this drop. Erosion is sometimes stimulated by broader factors such as inter-group and inner-group relations, by assessments of individual and social prospects, by the entire spectrum of elements determining a person's social status in capitalist society. Now and then it may seem that discontent is totally unmotivated, fitting into the irrational explanatory formula of "having it too good".

But things are much more complicated in capitalist reality. The sense of contentedness cannot fail to see the unabating class storms, the growth of the political struggle of the working people, and the actions of young people and the inhabitants of ghettos.

The thickening of the atmosphere of organised and unorganised crime, social stratification, the crisis of culture, the moral degradation, the unending inflation and rising prices, the problems of towns and young people, racial animosity, militarism, exploitation and much else exist not somewhere in the clouds of philosophical generalisations and not in impersonal statistics. They envelop the sense of contentedness on all sides, and are always open to empirical or informational observation. They cannot be destroyed either by incantations addressed to others or by self-suggestion.

Collaterally, developments swamp even those who had formerly held aloof or were even loyal to the bourgeois social system, more and more frequently drawing them into the vortex of ideological passions and even into the orbit of mass actions. The former meek consumer of the myths of industrial society is becoming fastidious. The erstwhile harmony and outward cogency of these myths no longer evoke enthusiasm in him, while the theory that the "free world" of capitalism is perfect is more and more frequently revealing its instability. He feels that these myths reflect reality



no better than the reverse side of a mirror. His trust in them begins to break. The allowance for the natural striving for social advertisement to somewhat exaggerate achievements, while social criticism somewhat magnifies vices, in other words, the attempts to maintain internal equilibrium by accentuating moderation, does not bring any tangible relief either. Neither is any escape afforded by the insurance injection of a ridiculously small dose of pessimism and nihilism carefully introduced into the sense of contentedness to avoid straining it.

The hypnotic flourishes of prosperity, of a smooth future and of show-window alluring ideals are weakening. Inevitable sobering is now to be observed in industrial society. The demons of social ferment are breaking loose. Time and again the sense of contentedness comes into conflict with itself. It is being increasingly overpowered by a sense of uncertainty, has more and more frequent fits of anxiety and is secretly gnawed by dismal apprehensions. Albeit slowly and vaguely, it is beginning to discover for itself the world of exploitation, alienation and suffering. Gradually, this recovery of sight is covering a growing range of values, beginning with imposed ideals and stereotype behaviour patterns accompanying contentedness, and ending with the policies of the ruling élite. Bourgeois myths are no longer able to captivate the imagination, much less to console. The formerly unshakeable faith in the foundations of society is beginning to crumble. "Sacrosanct principles" and assurances are proving to be nothing but an opiate. The optimistic forecasts of the ruling class claiming to put out every kind of threat are increasingly displaying their hollowness. The mechanism of social suggestion is misfiring.

People are moving away from contentedness on different levels. The emotional sphere is reacting the fastest. The first changes are taking place on the level of social psychology. This is the first area in which an underground is shaping. Alienated and exhausting work for the capitalist, brutal competition and the pseudo-collectivist life, and the barrenness and illusoriness of aims engender and pile up irritation, anxiety, a sense of emptiness, helplessness, instability and dependence on blind and uncontrollable forces. The loneliness, estrangement and anonymous existence in

capitalist society give rise to weary discontent, depression and a fear complex. The entertainment industry is unable to alleviate or entirely distract from them. The requirements of social discipline and the ideological notions engulfing the sense of contentedness collide with the instinctive life of people and insist on suppressing this life.

Uncontrolled "fear of the blind force of capital"\* gives birth to specific religious feeling and the need for special forms of comfort. While justifying fear and suffering, the religious consciousness endeavours artificially to create harmony between man and the world. It strives to assert the conformist way of feeling and thought binding man to a fixed social position and to the role springing from that position. Religion instils belief in a world of serenity and bliss, where evil is atoned for and suffering surmounted. The purpose of this faith is to help people bear real suffering in the hope of attaining self-limited happiness on earth as a pale copy of bliss in the other world.

Throughout the ages religion has been "repairing" the spirit broken by the conditions of life (and by religion itself), and the purpose of the sense of contentedness functionally coincides with this task. This sense only demonstrates the possibility of performing this role without having recourse to the idea of God, without generating any special religious emotions or developing supernatural methods for the socio-psychological guidance of people, but only making use of myths that outwardly seem to be quite rational. However, for their content these myths, which accentuate consumer hopes, differ from religious hopes only outwardly. In the same way as religious bliss is not a vital activity, but only a terrestrial or celestial addition to it, consumer pleasures are on the far side of that activity.

The widespread character of the sense of contentedness as a functional equivalent of religious consciousness is often regarded as evidence of the process of desanctification, i.e., of the decline of the significance of and interest in the problem of the supernatural. By coming forward as a substitute for or analogue of the illusory happiness that religion offers instead of real happiness and by illusorily satis-

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 406.

fying actually unsatisfied social requirements, the sense of contentedness has been able to annex much of the territory that formerly belonged to religion. The impression that the sense of contentedness is a replacement is strengthened by the countless attacks of clericals, who thunder that the consumer orientation is the source of malignant atheism and scepticism, of social disorganisation and, generally, of all of civilisation's misfortunes.

However, the situation is totally different from the picture given of it by clericals and the superficial observer. The individual recruited by the sense of contentedness and unable to find a way out of the tormenting contradiction between the consumer way of life, the hedonistic ideal, on the one hand, and the unauthenticity of the achieved contentedness as a consequence of the social instability of his own status and the general course of life, on the other, clings to fantastic notions expressing inner dissatisfaction that seem to relieve pain and afford tranquillity. Motivations that in one way or another reproduce religion with its transfer of the conflicts of the external world to the world of the split subjective "I", seethe at the back of the sense of contentedness, which aims to achieve terrestrial blessings and is at first glance purely temporal.

Since the sense of contentedness is only the visible portion of the iceberg concealing fear and unhappiness, it sustains the attraction for religion, the need for an illusory sun, the striving for a religious variant of spectral happiness. However earthly, consumer ideas and moods do not dismiss religion into retirement. On the contrary, they bring it into their orbit, looking for and finding in it their complement and foundation for attachment to the state-monopoly status quo. In turn, it has come to light that religion's adaptive possibilities have not been exhausted: it is energetically looking for ways of enabling its notions, values, symbols, rituals and language to coexist with the notions, dogmas and stereotype attitudes of the secular religion, namely, the ideology of consumption.

From emotions let us now pass to a level where there is self-accounting and reflection. It is said that of all unquestioned things the most unquestioned is doubt. From it begins the departure from contentedness. Opinion, the most

changeable and unsystematised part of consciousness, begins to waver first. Step by step it accumulates views that deviate from the norm. And this, of course, leaves a trace although by itself opinion does not mould any new convictions.

Doubts are now arising also in the sphere of notions about the surrounding social reality. For a fairly long time fixed convictions and established "practical philosophy" were able to ignore these doubts and block the menacing impact of new notions and assessments. But the system of convictions formed by the sense of contentedness (if the concoction of consumer aspirations, narrow-minded notions and simplified dogmas comprising the ideological arsenal of the sense of contentedness can be called convictions at all) is gradually going to pieces.

To a certain point doubts are suppressed by the individual, by the basic patterns of his consciousness (ideals in life and notions), adjusted and fitted into these patterns, because the sense of contentedness resists renewal, having become accustomed to a somnolent existence, which makes allowance solely for decorative conflicts between opinions, knowledge and faiths. But the seeds of doubt, like grass germinating through asphalt, have a doggedness that is in no way less than the momentum of old beliefs. It is harder to set a body in motion than later to sustain that motion: although wavering likewise requires resolve, when it begins it proves to be increasingly more difficult to stop. Wavering is the death-knell of the sense of contentedness. Outwardly everything may remain unchanged as of old for a long time, especially as language and symbols as attributes of confidence, impressiveness and complacency continue to yield some very tangible dividends, maintaining prestige and a definite status. The sense of contentedness is hypocritical, but to preserve order in its own house it has to pay with double hypocrisy.

When it is alone with itself and feels not only a vague anxiety and fear but also doubts in the correctness of its established behaviour standards and dogmas, it sheds the tinsel of its marks of distinction. The bastions of contentedness totter. The onslaught of doubts inexorably mounts, forcing a reconsideration of the perception of the world. To the sense of contentedness it now begins to seem more and more

frequently that a different mental attitude is not simply a generalisation of individual, generally casual disappointments, anomalies that cannot be rationally interpreted, "false subjectivity", an ideological craze. It gradually comes round to understanding that here it is not a matter of a quarrelsome character, of a dramatic turn in destiny or of age specifics. It becomes increasingly worried by a question that had long been gathering but which it had earlier not understood, namely: does happiness in the manner of contentedness mean voluntarily succumbing to deceit?

The phase of the retreat of contentedness in everyday, routine conditions may drag out for a long time. But by the individual symptoms of the crack-up of contentedness, symptoms in the most diverse and frequently different sectors, it is hard to foresee when doubts will be simultaneously and massively bared and illusions shed. This is probably the explanation of the sudden and staggering explosion of passions in the most incredible situations, in different and externally quiet areas of social life, for instance, at universities. As a rule, these explosions occur during periods witnessing an aggravation of capitalism's social contradictions, coinciding with a social crisis when latent processes surface almost at one and the same time among a large number of people. During these periods it is not easy to establish where is the cause and where the effect, what has been generated by what—the crisis by the pestilence of contentedness or, on the contrary, the departure from contentedness by the social crisis. The long-standing customary hopes of the sense of contentedness begin to disintegrate rapidly. The bitter truth that the expectations are hollow is seen with increasing clarity. While the series of blows does not give any breathing space or allow gaining the former equilibrium, doubts mature and grow into certainty. As regards the speed and solidity of this process, much depends, of course, on individual qualities of a person's character, on his temperament, cast of mind and national and cultural traditions, on the social position of the various concrete proponents of the sense of contentedness.

This process is taking place by no means in the quiet of a cosy home. The certainty that contentedness is specious is acquired by the individual drawn into a net of the most

diverse associations, into the struggle for existence and self-development. Participation, albeit sporadic, in the economic, political and ideological struggles against the state-monopoly organisation, against its individual links or representatives, is the mainspring of the changes in convictions, of the modifications in the world outlook. However, the very development of capitalism's social contradictions awakens the "sleepy masses", involves them in the struggle, leaving fewer possibilities for evading it. Even businessmen go on strike: for instance, in protest against the tax and social policy of the government, small artisans and shopkeepers in France are staging a National Day of Disaffection.

In crisis situations the individual with a sense of contentedness, driven by his desire to uphold his own and his group's interests, finds that these interests are incompatible with contentedness and comes round to the realisation that his former expectations and ideals were hallucinations. He begins to understand the vulnerability of his condition and the unattainability of his plans. The remnants of his goodwill for the bourgeois organisation melt. The satisfaction of some and by no means major requirements gives less and less grounds for gratitude to the capitalist social system. The individual who had only recently been permeated by contentedness no longer has any desire to take part in the farce of prosperity. To quote the noted American doctor Benjamin Spock, he no longer wants to have anything to do with "self-depreciation".\* More and more frequently he finds himself face to face with the torturing question: does the given social system protect people against misfortune or does it invoke them? Is bourgeois society normal and are there grounds for reformist hopes? The world with a rotten reality is approaching its decline. The flight from contentedness is becoming irrepressible.

But where must one go? The transition to discontentedness does not yet mean determining the direction of further progress. The individual who only recently had a sense of contentedness frees himself from the web of conformist opinion, from admiration of the myths of industrial society. The ques-

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\* Benjamin Spock, M. D., *Decent and Indecent. Our Personal and Political Behavior*, New York 1970. p. 4.

tion of freedom *from what?* is clear. But *for what?* to what shore? remains an open question. The individual sunders his old bonds, and through them his involvement in history. He has *already* lost them, but has *not yet* acquired new bonds. He is at the crossroads. If only it was so easy to acquire new links, freely join in history, select a new, sure road and understand what has to be done to change the "topsy-turvy world", to eradicate alienation and dehumanisation! However, discontent as such does not yet enable the individual to understand the causes of all these phenomena or the aims of further activity. It does not give a guaranteed basis for selecting the road to a correct social orientation.

Much prevents the individual from penetrating the essence of these phenomena, from bringing their causes to light, from understanding what must be done, and working out new ideals in life. The factors serially reproducing the sense of contentedness and dragging the individual back to the world of sweet dreams, where one may again give rein to the magic horse, continue to operate. The sense of contentedness is a coercive force—it is extorted or imposed. It is not easy to break the stubbornness of myths and education, and the tenaciousness of habit, especially in view of the fact that under capitalism there are safety-valves for discontent, while the entrances for doubts are thoroughly barricaded and made almost inaccessible to extraneous influences. For this a lifetime is sometimes not enough.

For some time the individual who has gone off the rails of contentedness remains at a crossroads. His consciousness is split, becoming dual. This gives him a mixture of contentedness and discontentedness. There is an infinite diversity of shades, hues and tints in this combination of contentedness and discontentedness.

Everything we have just said brings us round to the conclusion that, with all its seeming solidity, contentedness has only a momentary existence. In terms of time it is merely a stage, while on the structural plane it is a surface layer, behind which is the sense of wretchedness. In some individuals it may be thicker and more firmly rooted, in others it is thinner and more fragile. Similarly, the sense of wretchedness may lie deeper or closer to the surface; it may be at the stage of formation or it may be mature, chronic and

substantial. Clear contentedness is encountered not any more frequently than crystal-clear wretchedness, if, of course, both the one and the other are not a pose. As we have noted, the prevalence of one of these elements depends on the individual features of the actual proponents, on their affiliation to one or another concrete social stratum, and on the place the latter occupies in the bourgeois social system.

Content-cum-discontent is perhaps the most usual state of the bourgeois mass consciousness in our epoch. It expresses the actual condition of the individual, preoccupied and confused, overcome by anxiety and fear in the greatest crisis ever experienced by class society. The individual who has lost himself loses hope and is suspicious and sceptical. He becomes susceptible to nihilistic ideas.

However mutually contradictory the outlooks of optimism and pessimism may seem, the boundary between them *in the bourgeois consciousness* is relative and mobile. They gravitate towards and complement each other, each representing a need for the other extreme. Together they find themselves cramped but they cannot exist separately. We have just considered this circumstance from the angle of the transition, of the slipping from optimistic views and the sense of contentedness to the pessimistic attitude of the sense of wretchedness. At the end of the next chapter we shall show this mutual gravitation from a totally different angle.

### SEDUCTION BY NIHILISM

It would seem that the growing doubts in the consistency of the myths of the sense of contentedness, especially the rupture with them and the increasing certainty in the falsity of one's contentedness, should lead to a radical change in the individual's world outlook, preparing him, if not at once then gradually, for the transition to revolutionary consciousness. But this takes place by no means in every individual who renounces old beliefs, feelings and views. The protracted nature of the crisis, the clouded social status of the individual, everything that in bourgeois society is unstable and alarming under any conditions and particularly in the epoch of the general crisis, and the other causes that we shall deal



with below, create among the former proponents of contentedness an emotional and intellectual susceptibility to pessimistic ideas. This is precisely the basis on which the sense of wretchedness appears. Is it an ideology of the conditions of life expressing solely the "logic" of an independently developing practical consciousness, or is it a product of ideological manipulation? These are the questions that must be answered before we go on to the reasons for the readiness to accept pessimistic ideas and to the very content of these ideas.

Like its counterpart, the sense of wretchedness is not free of ideological and psychological influences and manipulations. Although it is the consciousness of rank-and-file agents of social life and not of ideologists, it may only be partially recognised as a direct reflection of concrete vital practice, of assimilated cultural traditions and illusions, of one's own, and therefore irreversibly curtailed, individual and group experience and conclusions of common sense. The point is that before becoming what it is the sense of wretchedness absorbs definite ideological notions (in the given case, of the nihilistic kind) in its spontaneously shaping attitude. These notions are assimilated gradually, not always consistently and most frequently in popularised form, in snatches, as scattered, unsystematised conclusions and formulas. Spontaneous empirical notions, formed in the process of breaking with contentedness and blind trust for the bourgeois social organisation, fuse with theoretically regulated ideas seeping down "from above". They mix, stratify and finally merge with more or less developed ideological structures. As in the case of the sense of contentedness, a special mythological perception of the world and, to some extent, the corresponding behaviour emerge.

What is the attitude of the rank-and-file proponent of the sense of wretchedness to the sum of pessimistic ideas assimilated by him? It seems to him (and he has more than sufficient grounds for this) that it is something fundamentally different from his own ideas but (due to some unclear circumstances) quite consonant with them and entirely bearing out the course and end results of his aspirations and thoughts. Without hesitation the consumer of nihilistic ideas believes that he is accepting a rational system of thoughts

set in motion not by somebody's whim or mercenary calculation but by the contradictions of reality itself. The concepts embracing and explaining the inner essence of seemingly incomprehensible but thoroughly familiar and intimate phenomena decoding his own feelings and moods pass before him as on parade. On the parade grounds these concepts, raised above the daily routine, go through fanciful motions conforming to the many rules of scientific thought. Despite their abstract generality, the judgments and patterns, arranged in proper formation and dressed in the uniform of scientific terminology, allegedly express the might of the object world, of the incontrovertible facts of history. It seems to the sense of wretchedness that these concepts fit into reality, which is complicated and tangled, just as this is required of a responsible quest for the truth: without dogmatic premises, sharply, critically and, at the same time, without biased subjectivism.

As seen by the sense of wretchedness, it is only the sense of contentedness, like the Rabelaisian queen of the Island of Quint, that quenches its thirst for knowledge with barren abstractions. It alone, it is said, can rest content with specially selected and touched-up information about the world, brought to the point of exhaustion by the burden of bombastic phrases and biased arguments, which in the long run befog rather than clear up its own interests. It is nourished by the waste of social thought, and thinks and acts under the impact of the false aims thrust upon it. To the sense of wretchedness it seems that it alone has the prerogative of enjoying first-class ideological output giving a true or nearly true image of the actual world and helping to distinguish the true position of the individual in it. It thereby allegedly gets the possibility of really elucidating its fundamental and not transient and casual interests.

Actually, however, the sense of wretchedness becomes the victim of self-deceit to a no lesser degree than the sense of contentedness, which it ridicules and slights, and for that reason does not oppose it as truth to a delusion. With few exceptions the philosophy of nihilism is only a theoretical description of the sense of wretchedness itself, its pseudo-scientific twin. Presented as scientific, the concepts and arguments of this philosophy mirror not the facts

of science and material relations as such, but the object nature of the sense of wretchedness, its attitude to the world and its beliefs, predilections and expectations of a "religion of ordinary life". The facts of history are perceived superficially as transformed material relations, a semblance and not as the essence of social processes. Instead of breaking through to facts and material relations and their adequate reflection, this philosophy stops at fictions, displaying its helplessness to take apart the chaotic accumulations and the labyrinth of the current notions of certain social strata that close tight the door to reality as such. It proves to be able only to systematise these illusions and semblances.

In the theory of nihilism the sense of wretchedness thus finds for itself the new, which ultimately is nothing but the carefully turned and fundamentally obscured past. It is enriched not with thoughts about reality but with thoughts developed, systematised and, so to speak, given a scientific dressing, about ideas of a lower order, pre-scientific, fragmented and ordinary, interlaced into the direct "language of real life".\* It operates not with facts but with subjective ideas about them, with ideas conceived in the practice of atomistic existence. It has to do with logic turned upside down. It only seems to this sense that it is acquiring non-preconditioned and socially unfounded truths, while in reality it has in its hands conclusions drawn from part of its own necessarily shaped notions. However the string of inferences vacillates, in the long run they return safely, with the sureness of trade winds, to some of the commonplace illusions of the sense of wretchedness. In the final analysis the advance to the cognition of reality proves to be a "drive to what had been known beforehand". Cognition remains encased in the narrow chamber of self-cognition, a prototype of which were the zealous studies of the members of a medieval sect who seriously were lost in contemplation of their own navels.

Painstakingly camouflaged in pseudo-scientific form, this circumstance remains undisclosed to the required degree of clarity not only to consumers but also to its creators, and also to propagandists of nihilistic theories.

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\* Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 42.

Let us consider the specifics of the actual vital process of individuals with the sense of wretchedness. Otherwise we shall never understand why the subjects of this process are given, to quote Marx, "enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world".\*

Let us first examine the social composition of the proponents of the sense of wretchedness. Fundamentally, it differs little in the main thing from the social composition of the sense of contentedness: in both cases we observe motley, heterogeneous social parameters and an absence of any visible or direct link with any particular class, stratum or group. Properly speaking, this similarity of these sham antipodes ensures the philosophical, spiritual kinship of these forms of bourgeois mass consciousness. However, there is no complete identity between these contingents. Although the veil of contentedness is more easily dropped by those who find themselves most flagrantly deceived by the prevailing mode of production and distribution (and these are, of course, mainly working people), they are precisely the ones who most rarely become voluntary recruits of the sense of wretchedness.

Some people of other social strata who free themselves of the sense of contentedness likewise turn their backs on the old world with its myths and hopes. They get the possibility of going over to the side of the working people, of getting a grasp of the revolutionary consciousness and of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Needless to say, this transition is not an instantaneous illumination with immediate conversion to the socialist world outlook. It is inevitably contradictory because spontaneously formed notions mix with the ideas of scientific communism, forming a chain of intermediate states. Imposed and consolidated bourgeois political views, moral foundations and aesthetic attachments are transformed gradually. The way of thinking does not at once match with the way of action. Old principles gradually give way to new. This transition to Marxist-Leninist ideology is stimulated by the bitter experience of own errors and by honest self-criticism.

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\* Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. III, Moscow, 1974, p. 830.

Although the possibility of moving towards the new world outlook, towards Marxist-Leninist ideology (and to a new system of emotions, to a new frame of mind) is used more and more often by people from various non-proletarian strata, still, petty-bourgeois groups, white-collar workers and intellectuals comprise the main social base of the sense of wretchedness. Intellectuals are by no means a free stratum of society. Their position in the modern capitalist world is dual due to the contradictory character of their way of life. On the one hand, intellectual work still retains a certain privileged position. Intellectuals are, therefore, aware of their prospects for holding on and even multiplying what they have attained, for making a career in industrial society in the sphere of business, management or in their own intellectual pursuits (science, culture, medicine, education).

Understanding (and frequently exaggerating) the significance of knowledge in the epoch of the scientific and technological revolution and taking into account its further enhancement in production and all other areas of social life, they hope to participate in controlling the decisive levers of power. For this, while taking part in the competitive struggle, it is necessary to fight one's way to the management of industrial organisations and the leadership of bureaucratic agencies, to be prognosticators, "social engineers", techno-bureaucrats (at least on the level of junior management), loyal suppliers of the required cultural values or scientists prepared to serve any preset programme. For this one has to be no more critical than the sense of contentedness, to take up arms only against the obsolete methods of traditional capitalism and welcome the modernisation of these methods with enthusiasm. For this one has to bid farewell to humanistic ideals and acquire faith in the stabilisation of the capitalist system, in its improvement through moderate reforms. Possibilities of this kind, which spring from the social position held by the bourgeois intelligentsia, make the latter susceptible to pseudo-optimistic ideology, thereby giving it a sense of contentedness. This is true mostly of the privileged segment of the intelligentsia, which holds high posts and has become virtually part of the ruling class.

Let us now scrutinise the position of the intelligentsia in capitalist society from another angle. Intellectuals react keenly to the social antagonisms of state-monopoly capitalism, chiefly because the vast majority of them are exploited: the conditions of life of a steadily growing number of intellectuals are drawing closer to those of the workers (besides, the intelligentsia not only reproduces itself but is also replenished from among the "lower classes", something that in the old days was, generally, accidental). They view with alarm how their former caste monopoly of mental work and the accompanying right to independent ideological expression of the new requirements arising in society are melting before their very eyes, how the familiar mechanisms of a career operate with diminishing frequency. Under capitalism the intelligentsia cannot help reacting to the paradoxes stemming from the contradictions between reason and foolhardiness, between culture and barbarism, between freedom and totalitarianism, between morals and science. The intellectuals tragically feel their helplessness to change anything through their professional activity.

The work of intellectuals is increasingly regulated by bureaucratic structures and fettered by the mercenary interests of clients, administrative supervision and the planting of the spirit of career-seeking and group struggle. By injecting time-serving and pseudo-collectivism, suppressing freedom of thought and conscience, and depersonalising their participants, the intellectual co-operatives become simply comfortable barracks. Conveniences and the certain prestige do not save them from the inexorable choice of being actually free in their professional work and social sympathies or becoming clerks of the bourgeois organisation, acting in accordance with the latter's class interests, and having their freedom restricted to whispering in lobbies, clubs, to friends or simply to themselves in face of "persistent pangs of conscience" (A. I. Herzen). The conditions for compromises and manoeuvring are being reduced to a disappearing tiny magnitude, and "either or" resounds more and more imperatively: either a betrayal of the humanitarian essence of knowledge, surrender with mental reservations, renouncement of responsibility and freedom of creativity, or effective resistance to the bourgeois social organisation.

The progressive segment of the intelligentsia feels the heavy breath of the capitalist system's crisis. It sees the growth and strengthening of socialism and the anti-monopoly and national liberation movements, capitalism's economic and social instability, its ideological poverty, its undisguised hostility for some forms of spiritual activity. It foresees a further growth of class battles and the deepening of the crisis heralding upheavals of an ever greater magnitude. As long as it regarded the historical process as progress, everything was rosy. The promotion of this progress was regarded as the meaning of history, of individual existence and the self-justification of this activity. This was in its time the source of optimism. But as soon as the progressive character of capitalist development was questioned, everything changed: reality became an absurdity, while activity hung in weightlessness. The sense of involvement in historical creativity receded into the past. An epoch of mass disappointment in bourgeois-optimistic theories and ideals set in. Having lost faith in the bankrupt bourgeois form of progress, the intellectuals swung to the Left, no longer inclined to carry out zealously the prescriptions and norms of the system that was doomed and could no longer be trusted.

Approximately the same duality is implicit in the huge mass of white-collar workers, urban lower strata, small proprietors and, to some extent, even a segment of the middle bourgeoisie. This duality is to be observed particularly among students, who react most sensitively to the crisis of the capitalist system. With the same rapidity that it grows this segment is losing its faith in the bourgeois symbols of prosperity, in the allurements of industrial society, in the fetish of a future career, in the immutability of the scale and yardsticks of the sense of contentedness.

From the specifics of the objective social position of these strata and groups stems the specific type of thinking, social characters and emotional states. It would be naïve to believe that the ideas prevailing among these strata are solely the result of lack of information, of a false train of thought leading to erroneous conclusions, the result of an infantile level of thinking and only an inability to explain the essence of social development. Also, it would be wrong to think that

these ideas arise solely as a result of the operation of "fate" that has so successfully duped huge numbers of people. Their consciousness is consonant with "their conditions of life",\* the objective logic of circumstances inducing them to think and act in the given and no other way. It moves not arbitrarily but in a direction prescribed by the conditions of their life. Not ideas give rise to the modes of the vital process of the vacillating social strata and groups, but these very modes, of course with the assistance of "fate" (i.e., the corresponding ideological pressure), set the content of the notions and the specifics of the thinking and feeling of these groups. It is in this context that these content and specifics are not rubbish, an invention, deceit or a mistake.

In capitalist society the intelligentsia, by virtue of its relative independence and the separation of labour by brain from labour by hand, is inclined towards abstractions, idealistic illusions, building castles in the air, towards escaping from real needs, the bustle of daily life and practical tasks into the realm of refined pure ideas and exalted ideals. Even when it is not directly linked with the struggle of the working people, it is able to put forward progressive demands, to which it is prompted by the requirements of the development of industry, management, science, art, education and medicine. However, the fact that it is in the very nature of the intellectual's way of thinking to separate theory from practice makes him disposed to contemplation, awakens in him the desire to "do the world a favour" by trying to explain it again and again instead of helping practically to reshape it on the basis of cognised laws.

Further, the circumstance that the intelligentsia does not comprise a special class makes intellectuals believe that they are in a position to express common interests as unprejudiced class-neutrals with King Truth as their sole inspiration. This pretentious illusion is the soil for political short-sightedness and a certain moral callousness and insensitiveness to the suffering of all other strata of working people. A tendency is generated towards misinterpreting the unquestioned fact of the numerical growth of the intelligentsia, of the regrouping and mutations it is undergoing as a social stratum, its

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 411.



concentration at large industrial, scientific and educational centres, its increasing possibilities for organisation and, consequently, its growing influence on social processes.

It is inclined to regard its interests, of which it has a narrow and one-sided understanding, as a universal criterion of social needs, setting them above the interests of the people. And when its thinking runs along the lines that "everything benefiting the intelligentsia benefits all society" it has either to fight for the aims we are already familiar with—to become a co-ruler in industrial society, to take its place among social leaders, become agents of corporate business and win the right to certain sparingly measured-out spiritual benefits—or, where it understands the limitations and hopelessness of the first alternative, it comes to the conclusion that, deeply rooted in its folly and dirty mercantilism, the world is moving to an abyss and, consequently, each has the right to look for an asylum suited to his tastes. This mission of atonement and salvation is anti-communist orientated, for the intelligentsia can only be revolutionary when it subordinates its immediate interests to its future, basic interests, and only to the extent to which it is able to renounce its group standpoint and adopt the point of view of the working class.

The character of the intelligentsia's work and all the basic factors of its life foster individualistic and anarchistic feeling in it. Lenin wrote: "... *The intelligentsia, as a special stratum of modern capitalist society, is characterised, by and large, precisely by individualism and incapacity for discipline and organisation. . . . This, incidentally, is a feature which unfavourably distinguishes this social stratum from the proletariat; it is one of the reasons for the flabbiness and instability of the intellectual, which the proletariat so often feels; and this trait of the intelligentsia is intimately bound up with its customary mode of life, its mode of earning a livelihood, which in a great many respects approximates to the petty-bourgeois mode of existence (working in isolation or in very small groups, etc.).*"\* In this lies the mainspring not only of abstract humanism and contemplationism, but also of apathy, fatigue, loss of hopes, because this stratum

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 7, p. 267.

is particularly sensitive to the operation of the "periodic law of social weariness".\* It is also the impetus for the readiness, in the quest for salvation from total desperation, to look for consolation, for ideological palliatives prepared by the pharmacologists of nihilism.

The instability and duality of the social conditions of existence of the intelligentsia and other strata and groups of capitalist society that renounce the sense of contentedness at a certain moment, and the entire superstructure of emotions, features of social character and philosophical prejudices towering over these conditions are quite clearly discernible in the intelligentsia's criticism of bourgeois reality.

What strikes one most of all is that this criticism, which may be inaccurate, shallow or impulsive, is increasingly forthright, is unquestionably sincere and sometimes courageous, and is aware of itself as a civic force. By expressing discontent, indignation and hatred for the outworn social system, it virtually fulminates against the injustice, dehumanisation, cruelty and hypocrisy reigning in capitalist society. This criticism's vital interest in destroying this system, its rejection of the "step by step" policy and the healing effects of time, its scepticism of the "organised intellect" being able to best capitalism by itself give it the hallmark of soberness, keen sight, radicalism and genuine democracy. Political realism and a natural sense of proportion prevent the piled up hatred to take the form of bare nihilism, of disorderly, uncontrolled and destructive action.

From here the road is blazed from democratic criticism attacking the most glaring manifestations of modern capitalism's vices (omnipotence of the corporations, manipulation of the masses, bureaucratic excesses, police arbitrary rule, terrorist acts of suppression, the slide from parliamentary democracy to fascism, obscurantism, dirty wars, and so on) to criticism of capitalism as a whole. A merciless diagnosis of the sick society underlies the mass inducements for active participation in the anti-monopoly, democratic movements that as time passes are able to draw their participants into the socialist movement. On this basis there takes place the

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\* M. Shaginyan, "Man and the Times", *Novy mir*, No. 6, 1973, p. 135.

transition to Marxism-Leninism as the ideological alternative to all Right and "Left", conservative and moderate-liberal bourgeois philosophies, the transition to support for socialism as the only historically vital alternative of state-monopoly capitalism.

But this is only one of the possibilities. Its opposite, while being not decisive but nonetheless real, is the possibility of a hypnotised understanding of the world and the corresponding attitude to it. It is hard for the intelligentsia's criticism to surmount its fear of the machinery of power, of the machinery of repression and ideological and psychological manipulation, its fear of losing its meagre but as yet quite real privileges and prestige. It trembles before the formidable force of alienated society. The consciousness of seeming helplessness and fear of the difficulties of struggle (in this case want of courage is not an individual attribute but a socio-psychological quality of an entire stratum or group), of difficulties by no means invented but real, requiring sacrifice, long and systematic stress, enormous restraint and subordination to the discipline of revolutionary organisations, lend this criticism, to use Lenin's words, its immaturity, dreaminess, political inexperience and revolutionary flabbiness.\*

This criticism has strong undertones of romanticism, utopianism and affectation. There are "Leftist" kinks, much revolutionary verbiage and more negative elements in it than positive. In practice it proves to be helpless and in many cases simply inactive. It deviates towards moralisation and, as a consequence, shows more interest in comforting individual ideals screening reality than in clear-cut social programmes and socio-political ideals. This criticism of capitalism easily loses its head in the face of the complex conflicts of the age, fussing, fretting, succumbing to mystification, confusing the principal with the secondary, the temporary with the permanent, the local with the universal, the superficial with the real. Believing that truth is the sum of two weakened opposite delusions, it nourishes partiality for the golden mean, for academic objectivism, for a third way, for the intermediate between two class positions and ideologies. It sympathises with systems of ideas proclaimed

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\* See V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 15, p. 208.

as non-class. It is impressed by a certain kind of "Marxism", truncated and falsified by various Marxicologists, reformists and revisionists with its strictly dosed social courage. It is prepared to proclaim hosanna as the ideal model of socialism and call for the crucifixion of living, existing socialism. It shudders at the very thought of the hegemony of the working class in the revolution, of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of party discipline as allegedly contravening the spirit of freedom and the banners of revolution. As a result, this criticism is predisposed to nihilistic teachings; at any rate, it is poorly protected against such teachings.

Does this mean that no distinction should be drawn between nihilistic ideas (whether expressed by artistic, religious, political or socio-philosophical means) and the spontaneous, empirical notions of the intelligentsia and the petty-bourgeois "intermediate" strata? The former cannot be defined as a simple copy, cast or analogue of these notions. What breath-taking adventures are encountered by commonplace judgments and images, when, having risen a "storey higher", they set out on the long and dangerous journey of systematisation and development in order later to turn back to their hearth and home ennobled and surrounded by the exhilarating fame of theoretical daring!

Nihilistic theories have been concocted in accordance with a pseudo-scientific recipe and are a perverse form of ideology. We know from history that not every perverse ideology was reactionary. Suffice it to recall the destiny of the plebeian-peasant heresies (Lollards, Taborites, the early Anabaptists and others), which used inadequate ideological means but nonetheless expressed the progressive social and political demands of their day and consolidated the finest elements of the spontaneous, empirical notions of the advanced classes.

But this has nothing to do with nihilism, which mainly recreates the above-mentioned negative properties and features of spontaneous, empirical criticism. It universalises and brings to culmination the sense of fear and helplessness, loneliness and alienation from the world, insecurity, depression and confusion, which can be surmounted in the process of struggle against capitalism. Nihilism vulgarises democratic criticism's readiness to think and suffer. It takes its

doubts in the significance of social action to the point of total lack of faith in the meaning of history. In the rarefied ingredients of nihilism's theoretical salads the emotionality of spontaneous criticism becomes the antithesis of scientific criticism. The intensive search for social truth is enervated. In the same ingredients nihilism's immaturity and emptiness are transformed into a virtue, the penchant for moralisation is elevated into a mandatory principle of thinking, while conservative romanticism and utopianism are given every sanction. The élitarian ideas of a segment of the intelligentsia, frequently cohabitating with democratic feeling, are inflated into an "aristocratic spirit", into faith in one's special rights and destiny. Everything that prevented anti-capitalist criticism from accepting Marxism and socialism, from joining the working-class and communist movement, is fortified in nihilism, and with the aggravation of capitalism's contradictions it is given an open or camouflaged anti-communist orientation.

Nihilism does everything it can to stop disaffection with and criticism of capitalism from crossing the Rubicon, from turning into revolutionary consciousness and action.

Nihilistic theories stifle and reduce all the strong aspects of the "ideology of the conditions of life",\* suppress that ideology's sense of anxiety and profound need for the spiritual nearness of people, destroy the forthrightness of its criticism that tears off all the masks, of a criticism reinforced by a willingness to act, by a preparedness to wage an organised struggle against social evil. In pursuance of its objective of seduction, nihilism proclaims that these aspects are alienated, that they are doomed to wallow in the ooze of prosaic commonplaces. It goes so far as to "correct" spontaneous criticism's notions recognising the value of labour, association and mutual assistance on the pretext of enhancing their competence. It mangles and deadens all the living, creative and advanced aspects of its judgments and notions, giving it the shape of an abstract system of dogmas and corresponding desperation. It does not let limited anti-capitalist criticism go beyond the framework of the bourgeois

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, p. 52.

consciousness. It makes that consciousness sick and really wretched.

At this point it may be noted that the work of injecting nihilistic ideas into the mass consciousness, which is poorly protected against them, is nearing completion with the formation of the sense of wretchedness. Starting as the spontaneous, empirical consciousness of vacillating social groups and strata, it then fuses with the nihilistic variant of bourgeois ideology and emerges as a sense of wretchedness proper, with its own vision of the world, feeling, logic, thinking, value preferences, ideals and behaviour.

Having considered in outline the genesis and nature of the sense of wretchedness, we can now turn to the content of nihilistic ideas in the shape they are being absorbed by the mass consciousness. Only after this the possibility will open for assessing the actual role played by these ideas in modern society. How does the sense of wretchedness, seduced by nihilism, see the world as a whole?

### MYTHOLOGY OF NEGATION AND DESPAIR

The criticism that the sense of wretchedness levels at the sense of contentedness, at its ideals, guidelines, myths of official optimism, is ruthless and destructive in content and high-strung in form. Without beating about the bush the sense of contentedness is called by the name it merits: an artificial and manipulated frame of mind. Irony, too, has its place—covert and overt: the proponents of the sense of contentedness are called robots, mannequins, gregarious or one-dimensional people, petty individuals, and so on. The criticism of society has a large spectrum of shades, which it would simply be difficult to list in one breath.

The main accusation is brief but weighty, namely, that the sense of contentedness is a superficial view of the world. Nihilism claims to have brought to light the essence behind the outward show of welfare, order, rationality and exemplary prosperity. Like a nest of wooden dolls the world of expediency, "general welfare", security and "sacrosanct" morals contains another world. It is asserted that the sense of wretchedness has the mission of tearing off the cover and

showing the other, actual reality. It aims to show all the mechanisms by which well-being is feigned. It will then become clear that actually this world is absurd and illogical, that alienation, violence, social conflicts, brutality and wars reign in it.

Nihilism does not spare details and colours to unfold the picture of man's alienated existence. There is no need for reproducing this picture here in detail. Suffice it to note that any society, mostly a technically developed society, is the target of nihilism's angry and allegedly radical criticism. It vents its fury not on bourgeois social relations, not on capitalism's modes of using machinery, but on machinery and social organisation as such. In machinery is embodied past labour, the labour of past generations. It adds live labour to itself. This is how production proceeds. With the development of machinery an ever lesser amount of live labour remains in the product. And this product, representing materialised labour, becomes the unchallenged master of people in capitalist society. The dead prevail over the living, creation over its creator, machinery over the working people, and society over the individual.

Developing in accordance with its own laws that do not depend on and are not controlled by man, machinery is allegedly getting out of control; without any pause at all it is converting man into a robot. High labour productivity and the technical might on which the social organisation with its stability rests determine the aims, the orientation and results of man's activity. They produce not merely the goods and services vital to man, but even man himself, entirely predetermining his consciousness and behaviour. In the age of the consumer society and the scientific and technological revolution and automation, the scale, depth and totality of alienation are becoming such that the antithesis between machinery and the social organisation, on the one hand, and man, on the other, is growing unbearable, crisis-laden and is harbouring the threat of a universal catastrophe.

Such is nihilistic criticism's portrayal of the effects of the scientific and technological revolution. Have the interminable technical upheavals, nihilism asks, not led to the rigid labour discipline forced upon people? Are they not subjecting man to humiliating schooling, reducing all the

wealth of his life to the function of a producer and operator of machines? Were they not what dragged him into the whirlpool of mammoth dehumanised organisations subordinated to feeble-minded bureaucratic leadership? Does not machinery foist upon people a rhythm of labour and rest that comes into conflict with their physiological nature? Does not automation, which fosters the mania of consumption and uninterruptedly reproduces vulgarity of the sense of contentedness, lead to dehumanisation? Is it not machinery, which engenders worship of comfort and then even greater dependence on it than before, depreciate the spiritual element? Was machinery not the means that allowed creating a formidable system of mass manipulation, thereby rendering the individual helpless in the face of the power of unprincipled politicians? Only a consciousness exhausted by the burden of contentedness hopes to cope with the technical danger with the aid of technical counter-means, to force a "humanistic muzzle" on machinery.

Technical rationalisation, nihilistic criticism asserts, has not advanced social rationalisation an iota. In the illogical capitalist world social order is cracking disgracefully as though mocking at the hopes of reason. Behind the façade of industrial society's rationality is not a commonwealth of people but a forcibly created community, within which a ruthless struggle for existence is steadily escalating. In this society elementary order is maintained by isolating the spirit, by suppressing the individual's desire for independence and resistance.

Using many ways and means, from undisguised intimidation and violence to a system of sops and refined inculcation, capitalist society strangles the individual's ability for free self-expression, for independent and responsible behaviour. It hinders understanding of really important problems, soothes anxiety and pretends that these problems do not exist at all. It degrades people and fosters its own convictions. It does all in its power to mediate the individual. All these values inculcated by bourgeois society are false. They disarm the individual socially and morally, accustom him to regarding the existing order as the only worthy one, proper and "sacred", teach him to perform his social role submissively, to cling to the symbols of spurious happiness,



to fight for aims reflecting imaginary or foolish needs, which in the main do not go beyond attachment to monotonous or crude pleasures.

But this is not all. As nihilism sees it, production itself cannot be rationalised and social life cannot be stable without an all-powerful, alienated bureaucracy, regarded as a constant source of idiocy that pressures man without any ill-will, much as an earthquake or a typhoon. Its victims are both the entrepreneur and the worker, the engineer and the shopkeeper, the office employee and the newspaperman, the official and the priest. Like death it is the greatest leveller.

The state of the alienated individual in capitalist society is described by nihilistic criticism in terms such as loneliness, neglect and emptiness. It holds that the bonds between capitalist society and the individual have been severed, and that the latter is alienated from history; both sides seek to utilise each other with cold indifference, and the relations between people are perverted. People isolate themselves in production and in everyday life. The link between them is a dialogue of deaf persons, each finding in the other a wall of incomprehension. Everybody else is regarded solely as a means, not as an aim. But in striving to sell himself most profitably (the so-called market orientation), the individual uses himself also solely as a means. Man is separated, as it were, from himself, ceases to be the master of his actions, becomes a slave of things, false desires, stirred instincts, and the norms forced upon him. He lives in a state in which he loses trust in himself, in others, and in society.

Perhaps, nothing irritates the sense of wretchedness more than the idea of moral progress. It believes that material troubles are being superseded by moral troubles, and that the old saying "man unto man is a wolf" conveys exactly the state of affairs in the sphere of morals. Man's nature has allegedly not improved in any way since the day Cain killed Abel. Morals have, so to say, only made man more sophisticated without affecting his primary nature. He is simply compelled to work, to reckon with the rules of social behaviour, to submit to social institutions and adapt himself to rational organisation. The sense of wretchedness

refers to the incredible baseness of competitive struggles for success, the bribes, the corruption, the industrial espionage, the bugging, the cheating through advertising, the increasingly more frequent violations of institutional standards in the attainment of set objectives, the growth of crime and the sexual dissolution.

Moreover, the omnipotent bourgeois social organisation and technological progress are leading culture and art into an impasse. Outwardly, they seem to be burgeoning quantitatively. But in fact culture and art are alienated from the mass consumer. Their place is taken by all sorts of substitutes as counterfeit as the consciousness of the consumer himself. The latter is unable to make an independent assessment of the products offered him: it is easier to choose a fashionable necktie than to find a masterpiece among the innumerable mass substitutes. Emasculated bourgeois art likewise promotes only such association among people as is consonant with the aims of the capitalist system and fosters views approved by it. Art is becoming a lever for switching attention to the required direction and a vehicle of meaningless pleasure. The artist who refuses to serve the bourgeois organisation is, under these conditions, forced to react to mass art with absurd élitarian art, and respond to facelessness with intense and morbid individualism. This explains the ossification of art, its backward steps, its degradation. The sense of wretchedness continues the aphorism "We have aircraft but no Shakespeare" as follows: "The aircraft was followed by the spaceship, but there is still no Shakespeare and his appearance is not foreseen."

Depressed at every turn by repellent, demoralising capitalist reality, man strives to escape it, to hide at any cost. Called escapism, this is exemplified by the fact that the family is becoming an oasis in the hostile desert of bourgeois society, a quiet harbour where shelter can be found in a storm. It manifests itself when sports and pleasures begin to be taken more seriously than the work that has in principle become alien to man and no longer brings him satisfaction.

But, continue the theoreticians of the sense of wretchedness, there is the ridiculously naïve belief that in capitalist society a person quitting the factory or office can escape

from the grip of machinery and bureaucracy. The family bears the imprint of all the social dramas from which man seeks to escape. Mass enjoyment likewise serves as an instrument of spiritual manipulation. Common conflicts become even more unbearable. In one way or another, escapist diversion and the primitiveness and poverty of sports passions accentuate the painful contrast between artificial pleasures, alienated emotions and man's actual feelings springing from his actual position in capitalist society, between what is and what people would like, between real and imaginary existence.

Besides, man continues to be wracked by boredom—boredom laden with indifference and anxiety, with hardly concealed aimlessness and inner discontent with the course of life in capitalist society, a boredom that cannot be cured by distraction. Man who lacks originality and full-blooded relationships burns with the need to kill time at all costs, to make himself insensitive to the burden of existence. Torture by boredom is bourgeois society's main form of suffering. It generates unmotivated crime, brutality and indifference to the sorrows and joys of others.

To free himself of the boredom of existence, satisfy the craving for an inner, cherished, intimate private meaning to his vital activity, which at the price of perseverance and intensive effort he has safeguarded against regulation by capitalist-serving rationalism, by official "scientific leadership" in the pseudo-collectivist organisations, man turns to the spiritual vacuum-filler obligingly offered him by mass culture. This "saviour" from the torments of boredom gives him the possibility (even if it is only a nightly possibility) of asserting himself outside the bounds of professionalism, outside the organisation forced upon him. This helps him to resolve the oppressive collision between impersonal contacts, in which he increasingly comes forward as a proponent of accurate knowledge (this is required by the scientific and technological revolution), and the sphere of general culture, in which he is a "mosaic individual", a casually informed individual. He is, therefore, not put out by the fact that mass culture, with all its fictitiousness, only "envelops the audience in a warm bath, making no demands except that we all glow with pleasure and comfort".\* Further, the at-

traction for the crude pleasures of mass culture is due to the need to stifle latent fear, the sense of uncertainty, the thirst for relaxation by the least possible mental and emotional effort. Antonio Gramsci wrote that there is boredom making the adventurism of the imbibed culture a need. But there is also concealed adventurism springing from fear of hopelessness, from the uncertainty of stunted well-being. People feel they are adventurers not by their own will and loathe this sort of adventurism. Hence their growing attraction for "sparkling" adventure that would give life a meaning and remove the uncertainty of commonplace existence.

Wishing to decree his own happiness, which he does not expect in capitalist society, man paralyses all his aspirations, making drug-addiction his sole aim. Ibsen's Peer Gynt was offered to have his left eye injured, being told that although he would squint slightly everything in his vision would seem beautiful and pleasing. Thus it is with drug-addiction. This explains the flood of stimulants and tranquilisers, which are called happiness pills. The addiction to these pills, used not as drug but as a means of artificially evoking a sense of well-being and certainty, is spreading with incredible speed in capitalist society. Society is being tranquillised, a French doctor noted, writing of his apprehensions that people will stop fighting their own weaknesses, that they will no longer have pangs of conscience and that they will let themselves fade into blissful lethargy. The temptation to find oneself, if only briefly, in the iridescent atmosphere of a dazzling and meaningful life devoid of the paroxysms of despair, of physical and moral suffering, proves to be stronger than legislative interdictions, moral bans and consumer or sceptical ideals.

Much as the troops of a defeated army wander back to their homes, mankind, the sense of wretchedness foretells, is threatened with departure from the scene of history, with dissolution in the back streets of happiness, of boisterous or quiet escapism. The orientation on pill-generated happiness, on drug-addiction leads directly to intellectual and

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\* *Culture for the Millions? Mass Media in Modern Society*. Ed. by Norman Jacobs, Princeton, New Jersey, 1961, p. 133.

moral degradation, to civic death, to physical degeneration, to the disintegration of the individual. Are there in this case any grounds for believing in technological prosperity, in the advertised social peace, in medical Messianism? nihilism asks. It holds that the sense of contentedness and industrial society cannot suggest a solution to the fateful problem of neohedonism.

In the attacks launched by the sense of wretchedness on the social organisation, the key, culminating point is, perhaps, its criticism of science. Science—and in this is regarded its cardinal sin—reduces man to the status of an object among other objects, a thing among other things. It gives knowledge and power, which do not affect the cherished aspects of man's existence, consequently giving something external relative to him; it has become used to regarding man exclusively from the standpoint of his production capacity and as an element of the continuously functioning social system.

However, the sense of wretchedness argues, there is in man something that is devoid of object characteristics and is therefore uncognisable, like a thing in itself, slipping away from the keen attention of science. This is what makes man a free and responsible being. His freedom seems to be boundless, spontaneous and causally undeducible from his biological nature and the social relations into which he is drawn. As the sense of wretchedness sees it, the question "What am I?" (and, therefore, "What must I be?") cannot be scientifically answered: the competence of science ends at the threshold of this most important question.

It is asserted that the most subtle instruments of analytic study developed by psychology, biology and the social sciences are quite useless when the Socratic maxim of "know yourself" has to be implemented. It is claimed that here science gives fake knowledge of man, that it allows bringing to light and describing the convictions of people belonging to different social groups, that it is able to forecast even what will occur if a certain change of convictions takes place, but it is fundamentally powerless to formulate and substantiate any convictions. "Scientific convictions", a "scientific world outlook" and the "science of happiness and the meaning of life" are branded as nonsense by the sense of

wretchedness. Not only does science fail to make man happier, but it gives birth to the absurd confidence that the formula of happiness has been found or that it is not even needed. Many people expect miracles of science, just as they had once expected of religion, but, it is asserted, it only confuses man, destroys established values and ways of life, giving nothing in return.

With its anti-scientific affectation, the sense of wretchedness not only draws attention to the fact that science has given man the weapons for self-destruction but also accentuates science's role in consolidating "degenerate" social reality, its participation in moulding a mass utilitarian orientation. The sense of wretchedness is particularly fault-finding relative to the social sciences. In its eyes they have irremediably compromised themselves by being engaged either in providing the bourgeois social organisation with direct functional services or in abstract theorising in order to conceal the irrationality of social life. Where their theories are concerned, it asks a question only about one of their aspects: Are they apologetic? Only that theory is said to be creditable which serves nobody's interests. But since such theories cannot be found, all are unconditionally rejected one after another. So far as the sense of wretchedness is concerned, the question of whether the given theory provides authentic knowledge is immaterial. Further, the more accurate the knowledge in a theory the more it is regarded as a dangerous instrument in the hands of society hostile to an individual.

The sense of wretchedness sums up its criticism of society, science and technology in the following conclusions. In the world of consumption man ceases to be the maker of history and culture. It would even be absurd to ask if in the course of history man becomes happier. He wants to use science and technology to make himself the master of the world, but every step in that direction leads to the individual's ruin and self-destruction. In our day man has fallen victim to the "terror of the commonplace". He is entangled in a web of suffering and gripped by fear. This is not the usual fear controlled by the consciousness and perceived by it as a psycho-physiological signal of danger, as a call for the mobilisation of all forms of energy for self-defence. It is a gen-

eral fear, which does not directly menace a person's health or his property, relationships, status or life. Dreading an encounter with this fear man strives to hide in bustle, in day-to-day routine, in preoccupation. The sense of contentedness (or, to put it in another way, the unguine, herd existence) is precisely a means of fleeing this fear. Even though man has somehow found refuge in society, acquiring some tranquillity in consumer cares, he is returned to his encounter with fear by the course of life. He is haunted by vague anxiety, by a sense of helplessness and isolation. He experiences fear of some incomprehensible and sinister force, of awaiting his end, his doom. Fear is the payment for consumer service. Never before has there been so deep an abyss between the vaunted outward well-being, the delusive happiness presented to the masses by highly developed civilisation, and the actual but concealed unhappiness, the bitter sense of dissatisfaction, fear, despair, and universal and chronic neurosis. Such is the result of the nihilistic criticism of capitalist society. The sense of wretchedness is actually a sense of contentedness, camouflaged and dulled by all forms of social drug-addiction.

So far we have considered only the postulates of and approaches to nihilism. One can enter its main mansion only by examining the question of the attitude to the alienated world that gives birth to fear and despair. Can the spell of alienation be lifted or is it inevitable? This is the question of questions.

Having laid bare and demonstrated the emptiness, danger and duplicity of the reasonable-unreasonable world, the sense of wretchedness, elevated to the philosophical level of reflection, resolutely rises up in arms against the view that it is somehow possible to rectify the state of affairs, to counter the course of events.

Nihilism asks: On what can the hopes for the future be founded? Is there some other way of judging the future except on the basis of an extrapolated knowledge of the past and the present? It is childish to destroy machines. The steam-roller of scientific and technological progress cannot be stopped. Interrelated, scientific and technological progress and social development will allegedly keep on intensifying greatly instead of removing from man the curse of alienation,

the despotism of organisation, machines and things. There is no certainty whatever that science and its applied achievements will cease to be used for purposes that have the least to do with the welfare of people, with the humanitarian designation of science and the intentions of scientists.

From the standpoint of the sense of wretchedness, labour and social activity remain alienated, even if the pressure of necessity, of direct material need is eased. The tutelage of the bureaucratic machine will be increasingly brutal, and the corridors of power will become even darker and more labyrinthine. Consequently, this will reinforce the outward determination of behaviour, which turns man into an easily replaceable, standard part of the social mechanism. This will lead to the further growth of irresponsibility, one-dimensionalism, moral barrenness and the consolidation of belief in all sorts of substitutes of a happy life. Man increasingly ceases to be himself, identifying himself with elements of machinery and objects of consumption. Orientated on comfort and accustomed to look for and press the buttons of happiness, people will, it is alleged, ultimately lose their ability to solve problems in a manner befitting man.

Continuing its hyperbolic, grotesque portrayal of the future, nihilism contends that social, political, racial and national conflicts will not be settled. Post-industrial society, in which arbitrary rule and violence replace and are given out for freedom, will remain in disharmony, for the conflict between the personal and the social has no prospects for a historical settlement. Social movements? No, they are merely forms of mass hysteria, of social intoxication, and comprise new and as yet only ascendant forms of super-alienation. Even if a classless society were built, it would still, in its depths, have this conflict as acute as ever, as a universal social conflict differing from the class struggle, described as a sporadic form of that conflict. It would even be impossible to hope that the bottomless pit of alienation lying between people, and between the individual and society, would ever be filled; any attempt to give effect to the "therapeutic" programmes of "social clinicists" would prove to be quackery. The most fervent admirers of social engineering are finding that manipulators are becoming ordinary consultants or clerks of the bourgeois organisation.



This social organisation cannot introduce real order, for it generates chaos in people's minds, even though it strives to inject abstract accuracy, pedantic regulation and planning in human relations. It is claimed that for that reason nothing can halt the growth of neurotism with its fatal consequences—aggressive behaviour, unmotivated suicides (in many cases incited by consumer excesses or unbearable loneliness), unchecked waste, a spirit of destruction, an inferiority complex, a sense of own insignificance or paroxysms of authoritarianism.

Nihilism considers that there is every indication that the shameless luxury of rich countries and the glaring poverty of undeveloped nations will continue to coexist; that social parasitism will not disappear; that the sense of contentedness, which regards social order as unquestioned and propagates philistinism, vulgarity and irresponsibility on a growing scale, will go on reproducing itself; that each step forward takes mankind ever farther from peace of mind and the grandeur of spirit, from integrity, albeit primitive, that is the only source of human happiness.

After this gloomy picture of society's future, the sense of wretchedness lists the familiar threats to civilisation. The same package held aloft by the sense of contentedness, with the same non-class approach to the causes and manifestations of these threats. The only difference is that it flatly rejects any radical way of resolving them and the belief that there may be any improvement. For the sense of wretchedness threats evolve into a despair complex. Here is the list of threats: man is allegedly degenerating anthropologically, diseases are civilisation's constant fellow-travellers; modern form of labour and life are beyond man's adaptive capabilities, and this results in nervous and mental overstresses and is the cause of some somatic illnesses; a healthy people is a gorgeous dream, nothing more; pollution of air and water, the death of animals, exhaustion of soil and minerals, destruction of quiet, aesthetic desecration of the earth, the withering of familiar landscapes and their replacement by industry-scapes—that is what lies in store for people. Nature, continues this insatiable criticism, is yielding to the furious onslaught of human restiveness; devastated and overwhelmed, it is collapsing and dying. However, man is paying

long and painfully for his ingratitude, because all the threats, precipitated and slighted with incredible frivolity by civilisation itself, operate not only as a factor furthering mankind's emotional and physical impoverishment but also as a factor dehumanising the social life and the relations between people. Nature will not, as had formerly been the case, allow man's nervous system any rest; it will no longer serve as a vent from the crowded life of dirty towns, which are becoming gigantic necropolises.

Present-day prosperity, nihilism says, is proceeding in a nightmare situation: "If you want peace, prepare for war." Man has devised means of self-destruction, is endeavouring to improve them and is allegedly in no position to prevent their use. The reasonable-unreasonable world in which he lives does not tolerate a weaponless vacuum. Horror is inspired by the fact that people have grown accustomed to remain calm in their homes on the slopes of an active volcano. When a feast takes place during a plague epidemic, one wants to know what the future looks like not to the revellers, already hit by the epidemic, but whether any future at all is expected; as a matter of fact, even before the fatal button is pressed war will reap a bounteous harvest through fear, the burden of armaments (approximately 250 billion dollars annually on a global scale), licentiousness and the anxiety of waiting. Despite the primitive hopes of the sense of contentedness, the cold war has practically no alternative to a hot war with nuclear destruction. Catastrophe hangs overhead and it may even be touched.

No, the future should be not awaited but feared, Nihilism asserts that only the vulgar consciousness can believe the naïve assumption that in future the tragedy of individuals and entire nations will vanish, that there will be no torment of solitude and no sense of horror from the knowledge of one's aloneness in a bleak and hostile world, that there will be no neuroses, no diseases, no fear of old age and no terror of death.

From this standpoint the conformist sense of contentedness and the theoretical optimism that substantiates and justifies this sense are the principal threat to mankind. With this is bracketed revolutionary consciousness and the historical optimism of Marxist-Leninist theory, which is criticised

by prior identification with the sense of contentedness and official bourgeois optimism. They sum up the "grand total", indicate some outwardly similar features (exactly as in the arguments about convergence) and the evidence is declared to be "irrefutable".

Nihilism proclaims that bourgeois (and, with it, Marxist) optimism is the most perilous intellectual chicanery, a feeble teaching devoid of virile criticism, a sure sign of complacency, credulity, naïveté, modesty and banality. As nihilism sees it, this is a vicious optimism because it is unable to understand the world as it is; it is dangerous because it cannot adequately react to threats. Only a person who has lost his senses can be an optimist in this world—such is the last word of nihilism.

We have considered its favourite gripes. Without running any great risk of making a mistake one can count on meeting the same personages in all their varieties, and there are many, very many of them: demoniacal machinery, hostility for science, despotic society, the horrors of day-to-day existence, the total depravity of human nature, the barrenness of revolutionary changes, the endless suffering and the inevitability of alienation. Nihilism finds doleful aspects in any problem. In contrast to "debunked" optimism, the mediating sense of wretchedness is regarded by manipulated public opinion (and by itself) as a sign of wisdom, analytical maturity and a boundlessly broad outlook. In any case, it bears the hallmarks of circumspection devoid of hasty and disorientating predilections for rosy colours.

### DEMYTHOLOGISATION OF DESPAIR

Stretched out before us we have just seen the world in the dismal light it is portrayed by the sense of wretchedness guided by pessimism and nihilism. Let us closely examine this picture, beginning with the demolition of the mythology of despair with its most harassing problem, alienation.

Every activity, particularly labour, is linked with reification, with the externalisation of man's creative potential,

with the conversion of his essential forces into something material that no longer belongs to the subject of this activity. Such is the way of creating social wealth, of increasing the power of man. The extent of reification may also determine the achieved level of mastery over nature, of the development of the artificial environment. As the objective conditions of labour, the means of production are always reified, but they are not always alienated. It is only ill-advised identification of these concepts that represents the alienation as something immutably accompanying any mode of human vital activity. In reality, as Marx had established, alienation is not an ever-lasting but a historically conditioned and transient state. By themselves labour and social wealth do not lead to alienation, which springs from the social division of labour, from the emergence of private property and spontaneous forms of social relationships. Alienation is a situation in which the various forms of human activity come forward not as their own associated force but as the force of things dominating people, opposing their needs and interests and coming into conflict with their thoughts and expectations.

In its class-antagonistic form society moved forward towards an ever higher level of the division of labour, and as this advance gained greater momentum the more ruthlessly was the energy of the working man dissipated and the more one-sided his vital activity became. Marx likened this form of development to a pagan idol to whom nectar could only be offered in the skulls of slain enemies. In the epoch of capitalism's decay the scale acquired by alienation is such that its hostility for man and its destructive effects on society are reaching bursting point.

The aforesaid explains the heightened interest shown today in the problem of alienation. In considering this problem from the bourgeois abstract viewpoint and identifying alienation with reification, nihilism has from the very outset given it a distorted formulation. Under this approach mounting alienation is severed from the main problem of our day—the transition from capitalism to socialism, mankind's liberation from capitalist exploitation, imperialist wars and all the ensuing consequences. It obscures the sharp exacerbation of capitalism's main contradiction—between the social

character of production and the private-ownership relations of production—with the resultant disappearance of the notion of alienation as stemming from the concentration of colossal productive forces in the hands of the capitalist class, which leads to the intensification of exploitation and the further impoverishment of the working people.

Instead of a clear understanding of capitalism's, especially modern capitalism's historical destiny, an anti-historical view is taking shape, and it is declared that alienation comes from the social organisation generally, from the factors of its might, from the mode of administering people and from scientific and technological progress. But since it is indeed impossible to stop that progress, much as it is impossible to destroy all forms of social organisation, the impression is given that there are grounds for the nihilistic vision of the world. In this case the outcome of the conflict between society and man is represented as predetermined—either submission to society or flight from it, accompanied by individual psychological methods of surmounting alienation: there is no third way! Since flight without the cover of fig-leaves likewise signifies surrender, both these variants of resolving the problem orientate the mass consciousness on the mode of action badly needed by the bourgeois social organisation. Both methodologically and functionally, the proclamation that alienation is a feature of any form of vital activity is an affection of bourgeois thought.

It profits capitalism to back anti-machinism, the Luddite approach, so that the hostility of private-ownership relations for the development of the individual, for social progress, is interpreted as incompatibility of machinery with humanism. Although dead labour, materialised in machines, does indeed add live labour to itself, and since by virtue of technological progress less and less live labour remains in the end product, pessimistic criticism is unable to discern the main, albeit hidden, contradiction—between the social character of production and the capitalist form of appropriation—behind this superficial contradiction between live and dead labour. This main contradiction surfaces by no means because changes are taking place in technological processes and in the scientific organisation of work. Materialised labour increases through the absorption of live labour only when, reified,

it becomes not merely a consumer value but a value capable of growing by itself, in other words, when it becomes capital. Then both the thing and value dominate man. We thus witness the alienation not of live labour (of the working people) and of dead labour (machinery) but of labour power and working conditions, which come forward as an alienated force, as capital.

Machinery is, of course, not responsible for the endless suffering falling to the lot of the working people. As such it does not give rise to wars, economic instability, unemployment and the immeasurable intensification of labour. Alienation is called forth not by machines but by their capitalist use. Automatic machines and conveyers do not dehumanise labour. They do not turn man the creator into an impersonal functionary and mechanise the relations between people. Man is robotised and his essence is forcibly alienated not by social organisation generally, but by its capitalist form.

Does not private ownership, whether individual, corporate or etatised, alienate from the worker the product created by him? The growth of technical might becomes a werewolf only under capitalism, where, partially delivered from its former physical stress, labour becomes a heavy press psychologically and intellectually. Participation in such labour is the surest evidence of social dependence. Do not capitalist relations make labour compulsive, turning it into a simple means of subsistence? Because of these relations, to quote Marx, activity comes forward "as suffering, strength as weakness, begetting as emasculating, the worker's *own* physical and mental energy, his personal life—for what is life but activity?—as an activity which is turned against him, independent of him and not belonging to him".\*

There is a certain element of truth in nihilistic criticism when it notes the conversion of social reality into a force hostile to the masses. This is seen strikingly in the alienation of the modern bourgeois state, which has become a monstrous, highly formalised bureaucratic system pushing the masses away from social affairs and concentrating power in

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\* Karl Marx. Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 275.

the hands of political cliques, technocrats and the bureaucracy. By driving the "lower classes" out of the sphere of politics and administration it usurps the prerogative of adopting all socially important decisions, gains control of people's thoughts and demands social submissiveness. It seeks to inculcate belief in its own infallibility, suppressing doubts in the efficacy of the hierarchically organised leadership. In the bureaucratised system the individual is not the subject of social creativity but only the passive object of administration, a circumstance that is scrupulously concealed by a maze of democratic trimmings. In a situation where fusing with the monopolies the state apparatus separates itself from society, the severance and mutual alienation of private and social life become inevitable.

However, nihilistic criticism, first, regards the depersonalised rule of the bureaucracy as a demoniacal force and even as an inevitable evil unanimously cursed but from which there is no salvation. It sees some meaning only in anarchic resistance to this rule, not because the mosquito bites of such resistance can in any way shake this rule but only because they give some satisfaction to the participants in these mutinous actions. Second, nihilistic criticism believes that power of any kind brings alienation. As far as it is concerned, the ideal citizen and the ideal man, the "man of organisation" and simply man do not fit into one and the same person. It thus identifies those against whom the activity of the bureaucratic systems is directed with those whose interests it serves. The class character of the state's bureaucratic leadership remains outside the field of vision. Once more everything is blamed on the complicating social processes and, at the same time, false charges are made against the democratic organisations of the working people, against socialist statehood.

Criticism of this sort does not, of course, cause any anxiety among the ruling élite, and even disguises fairly well the very fact of the élite's political supremacy, diverting attention from the actual reasons for the growth of the bureaucracy (rooted in the need to strengthen the shaken capitalist order), absolutising its might and seeking to discredit the only real force of the struggle against it, the social organisations of the working people.

Nihilistic criticism's attitude to the bureaucracy is typical of its approach to the entire range of social problems. The seeming concreteness of this criticism and the fact that it contains some signs of the times should not delude anybody: it is totally abstract and entirely purged of class indications. In its theoretical postulates this criticism brings society and the individual into collision as two poles. From the very beginning it ignores the question of what individual and what society it is concerned with as obscuring the substance of the problem. Then society is proclaimed as being despotic and indifferent to the destinies of the individual, while the individual is said to be suffering and alienated. What it suggests is neither more nor less than turning the entire axis of human existence, directing efforts not towards changing society and the objective condition of the individual in it, but towards the self-transformation of the individual in order to win at least a little freedom in the only sphere where it can be won, namely, the sphere of the spirit.

But any objective analysis of the relationship between society and the individual requires a class approach. Antagonistic society is internally fragmented. The ruling class is vitally interested in preserving alienation, i.e., the actual relations that are unseverable from bourgeois society—exploitation, private property, and the disfiguring division of labour. In order to perpetuate these relations use is made of the power of the state machine, bureaucratisation and control of behaviour. The ruling class imposes its ideas and world outlook on the masses.

By demanding, on behalf of the individual, the shedding of all socially approved standards and kinds of behaviour, nihilistic criticism mirrors the narrowness of the means of "entering" society set by the outworn system of state-monopoly capitalism (hindering the assimilation of culture in a way other than utilitarian or asocial). This becomes abundantly clear in a comparison with the vast possibilities that our epoch gives (and demands from) the individual. The thirst for "naturalness" wrongly conveys the social need for the harmoniously developed individual, whose potential strength has matured and requires scope for unrestricted development, for the unfolding of creative initiative and activity. Nihilistic criticism quenches this longing for an integral in-



dividual perversely, limiting itself to prescriptions for winning freedom by overtly or covertly impinging upon social guidelines and norms. In appearance only the concrete existence of man is counterposed to the social system. Actually, this criticism tears the individual away from all concrete relations, driving him into the ghetto of abstract definitions. By tirelessly fighting for the mythical rights of the mythical abstract individual, it not only does not protect the interests of the individuals of the oppressed classes and strata against their oppressors, but also betrays these interests, diverting the masses from the struggle for them.

Also, this criticism of society attacks science on the pretext of defending the individual. It goes no farther than recognising the historical alienation of science, of knowledge, from man. It argues that the bourgeois form of scientific progress and the entire accompanying range of contradictions are a timeless contradiction between science and man. It holds that any specific form of the acquisition and functioning of knowledge is an immanent feature of the existence of knowledge generally. But cannot science exist without its achievements being appropriated for narrow class interests or used for military purposes? As though science itself and not its specific social form of development implants the inveterate prejudices of anti-intellectualism.

In its attacks on science the criticism of society declares that knowledge has spread out inordinately. The time required to assimilate it is clearly growing faster than man's expectancy of life. Hence the conclusion that like the Tower of Babel culture is growing out of man's reach because of its complexity and volume. The day is not far distant when even pioneer scientists will have to admit their inability to raise this tower of knowledge by even a single millimetre. It is asserted that, having become a "thing in itself", culture is ceasing to be a uniting element and that it is leading ultimately to mankind's disintegration, to cultural wildness, to barbarity. The irony of scientific development, it is alleged, is such that a supreme tragedy awaits us precisely where we permit ourselves thoughtlessly to draw confidence in our might.

In this area, too, criticism distorts actual processes. To say nothing of the fact that the development of science itself

opens up hitherto unknown ways of effectively assimilating culture, ways that afford protection against the overwhelming deluge of information, it must be borne in mind that it is wrong to represent the assimilation of culture solely as a process of individual absorption of expanding knowledge. Nihilistic criticism says nothing of the decisive circumstance that capitalism shamelessly appropriates the results of the scientists' co-operative work, doing this in such a way as to prejudice mankind, science and scientists. Impasses and critical situations are created not by the immanent laws of scientific development, as nihilism would have us believe, but by the private-ownership form of the socialisation of intellectual labour that obstructs the free development of science, the conversion of science into the common property and means of the all-sided development of people.

Further, criticism declares that scientific development creates the irremovable threat of intellectual hypertrophy. The point it makes is that the intensification of thinking carries compensations: it alleges that as thoughts pulsate more and more strongly, the senses grow increasingly helpless and emotional deficiency becomes increasingly clear-cut. Is this not indicated, it asks, by the widening gulf between man and nature, by the sinister symptoms of brutalisation and moral impoverishment, by the decline of the role played by art in people's lives, by the fall of the prestige of humanitarian knowledge? It tries to persuade us that "modern man" regards emotional life ironically, as the antipode of prudence, the dependable logic of science and a constructive life. Nihilism argues that if emotions only prevent people from getting used to a rational way of life, their suppression is the pass to reality, the payment for feeling "at home" in the cold, mechanical world, for the possibility of attuning themselves to the rhythm of contemporaneity.

In its analysis of emotional hunger, nihilistic criticism heavily accentuates some of the elements it has noted correctly. Actually, an abstract division between the intellect and the senses is only an expression of deeper contradictions. Has emotional deficiency overwhelmed all senses or only those that are ousted and suppressed by the very conditions of bourgeois existence? For example, criticism ac-

knowledges that fear, despair, hatred and bitterness are deepening. However, it is not the scientific and technological revolution but its catastrophic development in the capitalist social structure and the crisis of bourgeois individualism that shape the situation in the market of human emotions. Indeed, the feelings that help to organise and consolidate human society and to foster humanity are rated very low, while the greatest value is placed on qualities that lead to success, to a career in its individualistic interpretation.

Without sparing the most sombre colours, nihilistic criticism aims its most savage attacks on the social sciences. Lost in the labyrinth of narrow practicism, bourgeois social science is indeed unable to embrace the entire process of social life. Preoccupied with polishing sociological techniques and procedures, with the creation of the instruments for picking up facts, it is an example of gross indifference to science's humanitarian purposes. While providing the bourgeois organisation with operational means, such a science is unable to draw up workable programmes for the removal of social evils. But the helplessness of empirical functionalism, social engineering's inability to resolve fundamental problems and justified criticism of sociology's narrow specialisation and its preoccupation with microdecisions are not sufficient grounds for the nihilistic attitude to social science as a whole.

Further, it is unquestionable that when bourgeois sociology is engaged in the production of universal doctrines it operates with arbitrarily interpreted facts. It assumes the not very honourable mission of ideologically serving "its own" social organisation, eulogises its good sense and fights all sorts of heresies with grim determination. Alienated from humanistic ideals, inspired by conservational zeal, devoid of the spirit of true criticism, and least of all interested in truth, it cannot help man. Can a "pure" social science, devoid of class partiality, be conceivably created? A social researcher inescapably adopts a definite ideology expressing the interests of one class or another. As regards the sense of wretchedness and the criticism guiding it, they feel that the ideological content of the manipulation of minds is almost the key cause of all misfortunes. Wishing to avoid finding themselves among the recruits, they eagerly join the propo-

nents of deideologisation. The sense of wretchedness and the nihilistic criticism inspiring it are facing a hopeless dilemma: they have to choose between a social science that cannot be humane and ideologically independent, and an ideology that cannot be scientific and somehow assert its humanness.

But why should a dilemma concerning bourgeois social science be regarded as universal? Does partisanship in all cases close the door to an objective analysis? The interests of the progressive class do not reject but, on the contrary, presuppose the striving to cognise truth. Whereas in the past the coincidence of partisanship and objectivity could be achieved only partially, Marxism-Leninism combines class partiality for the interests of the proletariat and all other working people entirely with scientific objectivity. As an ideology, Marxism-Leninism opposes all the fossilised systems of bourgeois dogmas mystifying reality, all varieties of sham consciousness. It is a science disclosing and cognising social reality without distortion. Its hallmarks are creativity and unity of the quest and propagation of truth—ideas do not lose their scientific qualities; they become the material force of social organisation and mass action.

Further, nihilistic criticism sets science off against philosophy, holding that the latter's purpose is to surmount science's imaginary limitation and analyse the tragic estrangement of human existence—loneliness, suffering, fear, death—which is inaccessible to scientific cognition. However, if philosophy's specific interest in man is not founded on scientific data and the application of scientific methodology it inevitably leads to mysticism and irrationalism. Marxist-Leninist philosophy has long ago shown the absurdity of the tenet that man's freedom is divorced from historical necessity, that it is unforeseeable and causally undeducible from his social condition. On the basis of its materialistic understanding of history it demonstrated that only by remaining within the framework of a strict scientific approach can an answer be given to "What is the world?" and, consequently, to the questions of "What am I?" and "What must I be?" Having evolved a scientific outlook on the world, it established that the self-cognition and self-change of man take place in the process of remaking the world; it linked

the existing with what should be and gave an objectively true understanding of happiness and the meaning of life. Of course, both happiness and the meaning of life also have their subjective side and are therefore most directly dependent on people's convictions, on their practical activities. Besides, happiness is intimate and purely individual. Science cannot foresee all the mutations of the character, thinking, will and destiny of each individual. But it gives a general characteristic of these concepts, substantiates the true orientation of human activity and shows the road to the humanisation of social relations. Science is inseparable from consistent historical optimism.

The scientific and technological revolution is opening up immense possibilities for human happiness. It allows delivering mankind from hunger, poverty, back-breaking labour and material need. Instead of serving the world of things, man will be able to make things serve as a means satisfying not only requirements but also the highest need—the harmonious development of man's strength and abilities.\* Nihilistic criticism futilely brandishes the bogey of frightening productivity, which, it alleges, inevitably leads to hedonistic ideals and a torture by happiness. The latter rest on hated labour, consumer cares, unending fear, neuroses and growing immorality.

No such inevitability exists. The scientific and technological revolution *can* make life spiritually rich, healthy and long; it can help to free people's consciousness from myths and moss-grown prejudices. But capitalism is hostile to mankind's vital interests and progressive aspirations. It erects obstacles to the utilisation of the possibilities provided

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\* Marx showed that the inexorable development of production leads to the saving of working time and to the unrestricted development of people in their leisure time by means that have become accessible to everybody. Besides, saving means not "*renunciation of pleasure*" but the development of strength, the development of the capacity for work and, consequently, the development of the capacity and means for enjoyment. The capacity for enjoyment is the condition for deriving pleasure and, consequently, the prime means for pleasure, and this capacity signifies the development of a certain individual inclination, of a certain individual productive force" (Karl Marx, *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie*, Berlin, 1974, S. 599).

by the scientific and technological revolution, diverting a huge proportion of science's discoveries and colossal material resources for military purposes and dissipating national wealth.

Let us return to the problem of alienation. Nihilism would not have been true to itself had it made allowance for the *revolutionary* surmounting of alienation. Properly speaking, its prime designation objectively lies in showing that it is impossible to surmount alienation in this manner, in orientating the sense of wretchedness on removing it by purely psychological means. Criticism does not go beyond stating the pernicious effects of alienation. It cannot understand that exploitation has stimulated the accumulation not only of alienation but also of the social wealth concentrated in machinery and the individual. Moreover, it cannot understand that until a certain period society's differentiation into classes was historically inevitable and therefore justified, and that it is therefore meaningless to ask whether the price paid for progress had been much too high. The "normal" unalienated world matures not in the imagination or somewhere outside history, but begins at a definite time, in the "topsy-turvy world" itself.

Utopian short-sightedness, much as blind negation of estrangement, is alien to historical optimism, which begins with the realisation that the maturing of the socio-economic conditions that change the character of social development and the forms of distributing social wealth is inevitable. These may and will be communist forms. However, to adopt a genuinely optimistic world outlook it is not enough to recognise that evils retreat with the irreversibility of time. This sort of optimism is helpless in the face of the myths of the sense of wretchedness. It may even paralyse the revolutionary activeness, consciousness and the sense of responsibility for the present and the future. However well developed the material conditions for the negation of late capitalist society, be it thrice outworn and injurious, that society will not perish automatically. The ruling class is partially aware of this circumstance with the help of its ideology, and it partially listens to the evidence of its delicately sensitive instinct of class self-preservation. While there's life, there's hope! That is precisely why so much

effort is expended to bourgeoisify the masses, to foster the sense of contentedness.

Whereas it is dangerous to belittle the possibility of opposing the sentence of history for a certain period, it is even more dangerous to exaggerate this possibility. Such exaggeration is a major source of nihilism, which bases its speculations on it and uses these speculations to justify itself. From the fact that the imperialist bourgeoisie is making desperate efforts to preserve its position in the world, the conclusion drawn by nihilism is not that the revolutionary forces have to step up their activity, accumulate and polish their experience of struggle, extend the front of that struggle and strengthen inner unity, but quite the opposite: since the demolition of alienated society does not become mechanically irreversible, one cannot generally hope for its removal.

This brings us to the decisive point both of mythologisation and demythologisation—the problem of revolutionary consciousness and action. Nihilistic ideology does not disguise its hostility for the revolutionary negation of alienation, persistently imparting this hostility to the sense of wretchedness at all levels and in all aspects. Nihilism directs its main effort not simply to the fight against the sense of contentedness and its understanding of the world, although this has been proclaimed as its principal orientation. The stated direction of its main effort should delude nobody: whatever the direct object of nihilism's critical attacks is, these attacks always imply the undermining of socialist consciousness and revolutionary practice. And here is the central point. Whereas the philosophy of the sense of contentedness condemns revolution, the fundamental break-up of the social structures, on the grounds that it is allegedly not a social need and prevents "healthy society" from developing, the philosophy of the sense of wretchedness holds that "sick society" can be negated. But it sees neither the aims nor the forces of negation, believing that all revolutionary designs and actions are doomed to failure on the alleged grounds that today the banner of revolution can rally only handfuls of fanatics, declassed persons, people disgraced socially and small groups of misfits, while the masses in the heartland of capitalist society

are indoctrinated by contentedness and are unable even to question the rationality of the bourgeois organisation, properly understand their condition or do anything to change it.

Nihilistic ideology dins into the head of the rank-and-file agent of capitalist social life: the West did not follow the road of Marx; only the backward, primitive East, and partially at that, took the road charted by Lenin. Although today it is hard not to see the grandiose revolutionary changes that have already been accomplished or are currently taking place in the world, the object of ideological manipulation continues to be told that no revolution is possible in capitalist society because there the working class has allegedly been absorbed and has lost its former class-consciousness.

The criticism of society maintains that the technical and social changes of the past few decades have transformed the working class. Organic structural modifications have led to a certain upsurge of culture, a certain rise of education and an increase of free time, which have allowed if not the workers then some of their children to enter new fields, notably white-collar careers. If as yet not by their social condition, then in any case by the forms of their leisure, their preferences and requirements, by their way of life the workers are allegedly being deproletarianised. They have become simply the lower stratum of the huge "middle class" and are eager to speed up all the processes leading to the eradication of their status as social pariahs, to the realisation of the hope of "what if", akin to the religious expectation of salvation, to confidence in a better future. It is asserted that since they are no longer an exploited class, the workers have ceased to be a class fighting for revolution: the former pariah of the social organisation has now occupied far from the last place in it.

Nihilistic criticism says that having made the working class happy consumers, the organisation has made it submissive and neo-traditional, given it a socio-psychological complex of contentedness and impressed individualistic aims on its consciousness. A person belonging to this "class of wage workers values chiefly what improves his status, his freedom of movement and his incomes, in other words,



his condition in the group".\* The activity of workers allegedly no longer goes further than group egoism, does not range beyond the fight for the redistribution of the national income in their favour. The functioning of working-class organisations, it is asserted, only contributes to balancing interests in the social system, involuntarily helps to strengthen that system, fosters the "socialisation" of workers, facilitates the remoulding of their interests into partnership with the interests of the bourgeoisie; these organisations are being turned into an element uniting bureaucratically organised society. Criticism claims that this relates not only to the Right Socialists and the leadership of the yellow trade unions, but also to the Communists. If the latter are not sectarian groups, they allegedly become reformist parties from whose field of vision revolution and communism disappear as the ultimate aim of the struggle. The calls for an anti-capitalist front, for class-consciousness and for organised efforts are wasted on the working class.

However, despite nihilism, development is moving along the road of Marx and Lenin. To begin with, in capitalist society the working class has been and remains an exploited class. The average welfare statistics so frequently referred to by criticism give a distorted picture. Criticism may be likened to the observer, in whose opinion two persons, one of whom stands in icy water and the other on a frying pan, "on the average" feel not bad. After all it is not accidental that bourgeois statistics are sarcastically described as the chief of the inaccurate sciences.

For some reason this "shrewd" criticism does not see the huge mass of people (in New York alone there are a million of them) existing solely at the expense of philanthropic programmes, forgets those who cannot afford to give their children an education, those for whom medical assistance is inaccessible to the extent that they prefer to die rather than to fall seriously ill. This criticism permits itself the luxury of soaring high over comparisons of minimum cost of living with the incomes of the "lower classes", irresponsibly letting itself be diverted from the growth

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\* Otto Kirchheimer, *Politische Herrschaft. Fünf Beiträge zur Lehre vom Staat*, Frankfurt am Main, 1967, S. 105.

of poverty belts, the housing problem, social insurance, unemployment—technological, seasonal and partial—and so forth. It cannot be said that these facts pass unnoticed altogether, but they are moved to the fringe of social life and are regarded as shortcomings of the system, as temporary anomalies.

In this case, for some reason nihilistic criticism forgets about the wage freeze and the depreciation of wages through inflation. Neither does it say anything about nervous fatigue, exhausting labour, industrial injuries, managerial despotism, the forced self-restriction in the satisfaction of cultural requirements, the bitter competition in the labour market, and the courage that is required to wring every concession from the bourgeoisie by an organised struggle. It fails to take into account the general growth of requirements and the living standard, the rise of the cost of labour power, which has grown more productive and therefore requires larger outlays for its reproduction.

Criticism along bourgeois lines gauges the welfare of workers by the number of things consumed by them, forgetting that "misery displays the colours of civilisation".\* It will be remembered that in Marx's lifetime there were no cars, television sets or refrigerators and that capitalist production did not feel the pressure of the need for producing mass consumer goods. "A house," Marx noted, "may be large or small; as long as the surrounding houses are equally small it satisfies all social demands for a dwelling. But let a palace arise beside the little house, and it shrinks from a little house to a hut. . . . Our desires and pleasures spring from society; we measure them, therefore, by society and not by the objects which serve for their satisfaction."\*\* Quite naturally, therefore, the needs of the working class are measured in accordance with the growth of social wealth and not by themselves. The needs of the workers have an objective source; they do not lie in the "expansion of desires", "excessive appetites", or a reluctance to comprehend capitalist society's limited possibilities.

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\* Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 6, Moscow, 1976, p. 423.

\*\* Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, in three volumes. Vol. 1, Moscow, 1973, p. 163.

Nihilistic criticism uses the gambit about the envy of workers, about them constantly blackmailing society, in the hope of proving that the working class is sinking in the bog of consumption.

Even the apologetically inclined American sociologist Bernard Barber has had to acknowledge that "during the last century or so in Western society, despite the emergence of mass-consumption economies, class differences in styles of life have not disappeared but have become somewhat more subtle than they used to be. That is what we mean when we speak nowadays of 'inconspicuous consumption', by which we mean not wholly invisible consumption but only relatively less visible consumption." We may say "that the trend has been and continues toward what I have called *the pattern of gross equality and subtle inequality*. This trend reflects and strengthens similar changes in the stratification structures themselves. If it looks as if differences of prestige, of authority, of income, or of style of life are no longer present, this is usually an illusion which is dispelled by closer inspection of actual social reality."<sup>\*</sup>

Improvements in the material condition and cultural status of workers sharply increase the need for more interesting activity and spiritually rich prospects (educational, social and professional), and for the eradication of factors fostering demoralisation. But, coming up against the wall of the workers' social inequality in productive and non-productive spheres, this growing need only brings acute anguish because it cannot be met without radically changing all the foundations of capitalist society.

The very circumstance that they are an exploited class evokes discontent among the workers with industrial society's official state of affairs (needless to say, this does not rule out the existence of a segment, consisting chiefly of the workers' bureaucracy, inveigled into the trap of contentedness). But even the workers' spontaneous discontent differs from the sense of wretchedness. The latter's morbid discontent can only destroy the spirit, instil fear of the

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<sup>\*</sup> Bernard Barber, "Social Stratification. Structure and Trends of Social Mobility in Western Society", *American Sociology. Perspectives, Problems, Methods*. Ed. by Talcott Parsons, New York, 1968, pp. 191-92.

future, of the course of history, associated with the preaching that the world is moving towards a catastrophe.

The discontent of the working class is not burdened by helplessness, by a predisposition to pessimism, to nihilism. However, since it is spontaneous, it does not give workers an adequate understanding of their condition and tasks. For instance, impoverishment may reduce a certain segment of the workers to social submissiveness or promote them to spontaneous revolt, to explosions of anger and hatred. No direct dependence exists between the revolutionary consciousness and impoverishment. In spite of what Aristotle preached, society does not necessarily have to have many poor people to be filled with elements hostile to the prevailing order. Revolutionary consciousness may be induced by the most diverse activity and feeling.

The workers are a fighting class. This is determined by the social conditions of its existence and has an objective significance. The working class holds the key position in industry and by virtue of its activity is capable of achieving a higher degree of organisation than any other class. Moreover, having no private property or social privileges it is the sole consistently revolutionary class. As regards "group egoism", we must bear in mind the historically exceedingly important circumstance that the working class bears much of the great burden of the bitter struggle to liberate all mankind.

Of course, the scientific and technological revolution has introduced structural changes in the population's social composition. But it has not dissolved the working class or led its consciousness to accept the status quo. Only he can think otherwise who ignores the main thing, the relationship of classes to the means of production and their place in a historically definite system of production, who identifies society's class division with its professional division.

The world outlook and morals of the working class and its social activity are not determined, in the main, by transient circumstances, by factors of non-productive life (consumption, leisure or enjoyment), or by organisational and technological factors (the technical content of labour, the professional structure, the cultural and technical level), although the impact of these circumstances and factors

should not be ignored. But whatever the changes that take place in organisational and technological relations and in the behaviour of the workers as members of an organisation, they cannot cancel the fact that labour contains the social relationship between the worker and the capitalist, who appropriates surplus value. Similarly, however much the consumer guidelines and the forms of consumer activity in free time change, they cannot remove the fact that consumption is only an element of the reproduction of labour power as a commodity and spells out nothing more than a continuation of the productive activity of workers.

Despite the allegations that the workers are being deproletarianised, the working class is growing numerically (even if we take into consideration the section directly engaged in material production, but if we take into account all the branch contingents of the working class, including those engaged in the non-productive sphere, we shall find that this class is growing not only numerically but also in proportion to the total numerical strength of the gainfully employed population). Used in capitalist society to step up the exploitation of the workers and increase the profit rate, the scientific and technological revolution leads neither to integration nor to the creation of a "middle class society".\* On the contrary, it deepens class polarisation and aggravates the antagonism between labour and capital. One way or another, it is marked not by unification on the basis of converging ideologies or on the basis of general deideologisation, but by further ideological demarcation, polarisation and the exacerbation of the struggle between two irreconcilable ideologies as the dominant feature of spiritual life in our times. In the epoch of capitalism's general crisis, the growth of political instability and the changes in depth in social and economic relations and the social consciousness of the masses, the militant spirit of the working class and its political parties, its readiness to take decisive action in the name of democratic and socialist ideals are winning increasing support among the non-proletarian strata.

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\* George A. Lundberg, Charles C. Schrag, Otto N. Larsen, William R. Catton, Jr., *Sociology*, New York, 1963, p. 366.

Underlying this support is the objective conflict between the interests of the handful of monopolists, who are finding themselves in growing isolation, and the interests of the entire people. These facts have to be admitted even by communism's undisguised enemies. "Empirical investigations," we read in a major anti-communist publication, "have shown that optimistic descriptions of the harmonising effect of the *embourgeoisement* of the working class and its absorption into the 'levelled middle-class society' are frequently premature."\*

However strong and intensive it may be and whatever headway it may make from time to time, social suggestion running counter to the interests of the working class and other categories of working people should not be overrated. Nihilism makes a fetish of the significance of mind, desire and emotion manipulation, exaggerating the extent to which the sense of contentedness has become widespread and consolidated, and arbitrarily abstracting itself from the class nature of socio-psychological control.

History teaches that such suggestion is always, though in varying degrees, opposed by the social auto-suggestion of the masses springing from their experience, from the notions empirically formed by them of their own interests. A spirit of rebellion that surmounts servile humility is thus born. Psychologically it stems from the suffering and accumulated anger and hatred of the oppressed for their oppressors; morally from a sense of responsibility to one's class for one's behaviour, and duty to resist, from sincere patriotism and faith in the value of labour and the dignity of the worker; politically from one's understanding of "re-compensing" and "levelling" justice. People have never been simple victims of egoism, slaves of fear, weak-willed objects of tyrannical manipulation.

In the direction consistent with the interests of the masses the strength of auto-suggestion is growing. With the emergence and development of the scientific ideology of Marxism-Leninism, spontaneous auto-suggestion is realising

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\* *Marxism, Communism and Western Society. A Comparative Encyclopedia*, Vol. 8, New York, 1973, p. 361.

itself at the highest level, finding in Marxism-Leninism an objectively true reflection of the possibilities of the working people and aims and means of their struggle. This ideology leads the social discontent of the working class to a criticism of the capitalist system, which enriches the vague, emotional hatred of it, frequently concentrated on minor points and false aspects, with logical consistency and systematisation, a scientific analysis of capitalism's contradictions, organisational principles, strategy and tactics of struggle, and the needed perspectives. It shows the historic mission of the working class and rules out the acceptance of exploitation as a natural state of affairs or the view that the working people are the "junior partners" of the exploiters.

This has sounded the death-knell of the practice of drug-ging the mass consciousness. The epoch, in which it is easier to make people believe they are pieces of lava on the Moon than themselves, is coming to a close. Through its participation in the democratic and socialist movement and its assimilation of Marxist-Leninist ideology the working class is proving able, while resisting the ideological and psychological pressure of monopoly capital, to acquire a revolutionary socialist consciousness and historical optimism.

Nihilistic criticism is trying to present precisely this enlightenment of the social consciousness, this release of the working people's revolutionary energy, to the sense of wretchedness (playing on its intellectualist, élitarian or simply petty-proprietor prejudices) as a rebellion of the man in the street. The methodological viciousness of this assertion lies in the fact that nihilistic criticism regards the views and modes of action of the masses undifferentially. In the "topsy-turvy world" there is, of course, a mass of people who are egoistic and narrow-minded in their needs and feelings. This mass is controlled by the ruling class and used by it for conservative and sometimes Right-extremist purposes. Nihilistic criticism depicts as normal and even typical the stereotype views, feelings and behaviour of this mass. The crisis of the individual of this mass is given out as a crisis of the individual generally in the epoch of the scientific and technological revolution.

But this is only one aspect of the question of the mass. The other is that a new collectivist individual, a fighter, thinking progressively and acting in accordance with his convictions, is being moulded in the course of the working-class struggle. Free of consumer and pessimistic inertness, able to stand up against conformist allurements and the philosophy and psychology of despair, this individual develops an immunity against the influence of the myths spread by bourgeois propaganda and does not succumb to the voluntaristic temptation of revolutionary rebelliousness. These are the individuals who join the ranks of the revolutionary mass, whose actions eloquently refute the dogmas and arguments of nihilistic criticism.

The revolutionary masses in industrial society have their own organisations fighting for the immediate and end goals of the proletariat and all other working people. Nihilistic criticism slanderously accuses them of opportunism in theory and time-serving in practice. But the workers' struggle for their direct interests does not make them proponents of any status quo, captives of the sense of contentedness, helpless victims of individualist suggestions, demoralisation and mass bourgeois culture. The Communist parties are uncompromisingly fighting Right and "Left" opportunism. However, if the Communist parties themselves do not call for immediate revolution and if they adopt a serious attitude to election campaigns and the strike struggle, pursue an innovatory policy and strive for deep-going democratic reforms restricting the power of the monopolies and making it possible to wring all sorts of concessions from the capitalists, improve the material condition of the working people, eradicate the remnants of pre-bourgeois relations, and so forth, this in no way turns them into proponents of neo-reformism. Even where they take part in government affairs and parliamentary activity, such participation is not directed towards strengthening the capitalist system, and instead of leading to social partnership it enlarges the proletariat's front of struggle.

Only political adventurers who refuse to accept a gradual advance are unable to understand the features of the present-day class struggle and the link between the struggle for democracy and the struggle for socialism. The mass revolu-



tionary consciousness of the majority of the people is shaped not only by agitation and propaganda. The alignment of forces can indeed be changed and the broad masses enlisted to the side of the vanguard only in a persevering, day-to-day struggle for the interests of all contingents of working people. The struggle for major democratic reforms creates the conditions and the springboards for the revolutionary replacement of capitalism by socialism. The measured advance of the proletarian legions is regarded as capitulation only by petty-bourgeois impatience, which cannot understand whether the movement is at the stage of upswing or decline.

How did the sense of wretchedness, directed by nihilistic criticism, overlook the actual revolutionary forces of modern times? The fact is that while publicly claiming to be independent of the pressures of apologetics and adaptive views, the sense of wretchedness finds itself, without suspecting it, entangled from head to foot in a web of dogmas decreed by official bourgeois ideology. From the vast arsenal of this ideology it borrows the most fashionable ideas and ecstatically inhales their poison.

Let us compare the theses of the sense of contentedness with antitheses of the sense of wretchedness. The former believes that the capitalist world is arranged quite reasonably, while the latter sees in that world the embodiment of the absurd. They are united by their unqualified recognition that the state-monopoly organisation is profoundly effective, stable and omnipotent, since it ensures a high level of labour productivity, technological progress, universal welfare and social stability. It is asserted that this miracle is accomplished through the self-negation of traditional capitalism, through the integration of classes, through social equilibrium, through quiet changes, pretentiously called revolutions, in the sphere of property and the distribution of incomes, and through centralised bureaucratic management of industry and social affairs.

We already know the true worth and designation of these theories and arguments. However, accepted by the sense of contentedness as fundamental premises, these illusions are repeated word for word by the sense of wretchedness. But how does the conclusion of the thesis

that "if a system is omnipotent it is good" differ in principle from the conclusion of the antithesis that "the system is bad even if it is omnipotent"? The only difference is perhaps that those preferring the thesis are prepared to and do give the worshipped system direct and unconditional support, while those who accept the antithesis render the intimidating system obscured support by the fact that they urge the renunciation of the struggle against it. Naturally, the system itself prefers open and uncurtailed support, but in difficult times it is prepared to rest content with indirect support. It is only intolerant of those who fight it.

But let us continue our comparison. As we have earlier ascertained, the sense of contentedness is convinced that by raising the consumer standard and intensifying socio-psychological manipulation the system can integrate all the main social groups, with few, chiefly individual, exceptions, with a uniform consciousness, united by standard beliefs and behaviour strictly in accordance with the role played by each group. Its point of departure is its contention that normal man is an escapist, a philistine, a consumer entirely or mainly, and that therefore the system will always have mass support.

But do not these selfsame fictions befuddle nihilistic criticism, which easily yields to the propagandist rhetoric and suggestions of official, optimistic theories? What change is introduced by the fact that the sense of contentedness sees in this solid grounds for the triumph of its faith in the rational character of industrial society, while the sense of wretchedness regards this as the cause of indignation that evolves into unending despair? The sense of contentedness proclaims with satisfaction that the masses have lost their revolutionary potential, that they have become contented and conservative, that universal deideologisation and depoliticisation are approaching; people, it asserts, have at last become engaged in what they should be occupied: hastily dropping their unpleasant duties they are getting down to pleasurable consumption. The sense of wretchedness repeats the same idea, but for the sake of symmetry changes the evangelistic expression to the sad mien of an admirer of the Ecclesiastes. Further, it is quite immaterial

that some people feel the need for psychologically lifting alienation by themselves and others do not (or they delegate this function to the system itself, which carries it out with the aid of the ideology of consumption, neohedonistic practices and show business); to some extent, a person's general state is his own affair.

As it looks into the mirror the sense of contentedness believes without the shadow of a doubt that it gets a normal perception of the world. But the same image appears in the mirror when the sense of wretchedness looks into it. Neither finds its own class nature (which, generally speaking, is not so striking as, say, its other distinguishing features—age, professional-psychological, national, and so on), the determining elements of coexistence and the social functions carried out by them. This is precisely a case when guilt falls not on the face but only on the mirror—the dogmas, guidelines and strictly demarcated boundaries of bourgeois thinking. The latter is inevitably mythical (with optimistic or pessimistic undertones) in all its tiers: from premises to end conclusions.

Nothing so clearly explains the speciousness of the confrontation in the integral manipulating bloc and lays bare the ideological kinship between the senses of wretchedness and contentedness as state-monopoly capitalism's indulgent attitude to nihilism's critical attacks. The bourgeois organisation shows a certain toleration of nihilistic criticism. This may be least of all interpreted as a manifestation of inherent democracy or an impetuous desire for self-improvement. Only the sense of contentedness attributes to it these qualities and pious motivations, seeing in the gestures of toleration an additional reason for its trust for this "democratic" organisation.

However, the bourgeois organisation is savagely intolerant of criticism that exposes its true aims, shows the secret mechanisms of its activity and calls for a struggle against it. It allows only criticism that makes capitalism's incurable ulcers and vices look like harmless defects, miscalculations, and so on. Criticism is free only as long as it does not step beyond the boundaries laid down for it. Any violation of these boundaries does not go unpunished. That is when criticism feels the tactics of arm-twisting, the organisation's

punitive power. It may be accused of libel or of unconstitutional action, of unpatriotic and subversive thinking. It may find itself taken to court, ostracised by controlled public opinion or subjected to administrative or financial pressure. The extent and forms of repressions depend on the overall alignment of strength between the forces of reaction and progress in the conditions obtaining in capitalist society, on the combination of innumerable political, legal and other factors. On them depends the very possibility of muffling, suppressing or curbing audacious criticism.

What sort of criticism is regarded as permissible in capitalist society? The label loyal is awarded to criticism of certain defects, individual actions, institutions and establishments, persons involved in illegal and the most odious machinations, and also to criticism of those who voluntarily or involuntarily betray the ruling class, in short, criticism from the positions of the sense of contentedness. But we find that criticism inspired by the assessment of capitalism as an absolute but inevitable evil is also permitted. In the epoch of crisis the bourgeois organisation has to twist and dodge and permit what was formerly banned. As we have seen, nihilistic criticism of alienation, dehumanisation, the predominance of machines, bureaucracy and bondage to things stems from the premise that the vices of capitalism are those of any industrially developed system and therefore insuperable. It cannot understand the objective dialectics of good and evil, with the result that it believes that both the one and the other are absolute, and cannot grasp the idea that any evil is such only for its times, while capitalism's immanent development gives birth to the forces of negation. The only freedom it values is the right to say "no".

This criticism is nothing less than disguised justification of the capitalist system. The tactics of struggle suggest that it does not hurt to use it since its attacks, however loud they may seem to be, do not deviate from the basic ideological principles of bourgeois thought. Whereas the system brutally persecutes communist and genuinely democratic criticism, it makes every effort to absorb nihilistic iconoclasm, directing it into the channel of hare-brained social

schemes or onto the tested road of moderate reformism. The system includes nihilistic ideas in the content of mass culture after popularising them, so that they can be used for its own purposes. These ideas are disseminated by the huge mass media apparatus, thus making the mythology of despair an object of consumption not only of "highbrows" but also a popular commodity of mass culture, a bijouterie with specific indications (misfits eulogised as heroes, the laudation of a nomadic way of life, the stigmatisation of bourgeois life, traditions and idiom, the romanticisation of the individual's self-isolation, of his flight from society). Belonging to neither this nor that group of society, these ideas are easier to sell to the mass consumer, and all because regardless of what it imagines and how it presents itself nihilistic criticism is devoid of genuine criticism and independence. This "most resolute" criticism of manipulation is being itself manipulated.

It forgets with staggering ease that only recently, taking pride in its firmness and dauntlessness, it has urged people to bear in mind the treacherous reefs and cunning traps, the ability of dehumanised society to hobble and adapt any criticism to its own needs the moment the latter stands gaping. Not a trace has remained of its own warnings about the dangers of capitalist society's sham toleration: in the long list of designations everything may be given a role and used to maintain the equilibrium of the social organisation.

The fact that nihilistic ideas are disseminated without hindrance creates the illusion that there is freedom of thought. In this freedom for nihilistic propaganda is seen a means of flexible adaptation to the bourgeois system, a means of gradually moulding a conciliatory (or, rather, a pacified) consciousness and achieving a link-up between criticism from positions of wretchedness and contentedness. In turn, this pursues the objective of demonstrating the "viability" of the system itself, its ability to get on with ideologies "hostile" to it, and establish seignorial relations with them. The system tells, as it were, the sense of wretchedness: "If the devastating criticism you level at me helps to kill pain and assuage the sense of alienation, go ahead and criticise as much as you like. Relief is given

not by a priest but by confession. If you wish to do even a little rioting—go ahead. You will be quieter later.” This sort of “democracy” on the part of the social system, which grants nihilistic criticism license to freedom, gives no grounds whatever for admiration, especially as it inspires this criticism’s demagogic attacks on the working class, Marxism-Leninism and the socialist countries.

Still, it must be admitted that it is not easy to manipulate the sense of wretchedness and the criticism emanating from it. Both are in many ways spontaneous, a living protest against the ruling élite’s rigid regulation of all spheres of life, against the increasing enslavement of the individual, against the restrictions on and formalisation of his freedoms. At grassroot level they have many elements of realism and democracy. Bourgeois ideology seeks to control them, regardless of whether they are a petty-bourgeois protest or a form by which the most sober-minded among the ruling class itself see that the old foundations are doomed. In one way or another, every effort is made to keep criticism within the bounds of bourgeois orthodoxy and utilise its ideas as a means of attaining the overriding aim of bourgeois ideology, namely, justifying the existing system, reducing the masses to submission and directing them without hindrance.

But because it is spontaneous, the criticism by the sense of wretchedness is sometimes more barbed than usual and gets out of control. When that happens it not only erodes the ideology of consumption and acquisition (the cost which is commonly covered by a disguised apologia, by the reinforcement of conformism at the other end, by a relaxation of socio-psychological tension) but may induce revolutionary feeling, democratic and socialist ideas, in other words, lead to a result that could be fatal to the bourgeois organisation. It may provide a way out to new ideological heights outside the boundaries of the bourgeois world outlook. This is why the organisation regards the criticism from the camp of the sense of wretchedness with mixed feelings: it is vitally interested in a closer alliance between the content of nihilistic ideas and the sense of wretchedness, but at the same time it wants to consolidate such outlets from nihilism as would reinforce the embourgeoisement of the

mass consciousness. An analysis of this problem opens up yet another chapter in the dialogue with nihilism.

But before dealing with it, let us again return to the ill-starred question of whether the world is reasonable or inhabited by monsters of absurdity and irrationalism. What we have said above allows us to brand both the evaluating arguments about the world being bad, about it going from bad to worse and their opposites as unwarranted. The very fact that they are put forward and logically or psychologically supported indicates that the thinking having recourse to them is unable to cope with the contradictions and paradoxes of the modern world. All this thinking can do is to record its various aspects in the most abstract manner, and it finds itself stuck in them. In its fossilised formulas and contradictions the world is simplified and depicted as one-sided: either as beautifully rational or as shockingly irrational. This thinking ignores the world's sensuous concreteness and the "universal modesty of the mind" when thought has the great capacity for treating "*each thing according to the latter's essential nature*".\* Or this thinking remains in a state of irresolution, doubt and scepticism, when the world seems to be good and bad at one and the same time, which conforms to the requirements of the person abandoning the sense of contentedness for the sense of wretchedness. Unwieldy bourgeois reason also restricts the possibilities of theoretical analysis, which together with it cannot extricate itself from the bog of contradictions.

So far as any scientific view is concerned, the world cannot achieve a state that may be described as absolutely reasonable or totally unreasonable. The only reasonable thing is the steady movement from lower to higher forms. What is burdened by unreason is not the world but what hinders its infinite development. Whereas for nihilism and pessimism reality is unreasonable and reason is invalid, for the scientific view only the continued existence of the historically outworn system is absurd. In our day the communist system is bringing with it a new, reasonable reality linked with the triumph of man's social freedom.

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\* Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, Moscow, 1975, p. 113.

The dialectics underlying the scientific picture of the world "is a scandal and abomination to bourgeoisdom and its doctrinaire professors, because it includes in its comprehension and affirmative recognition of the existing state of things, at the same time also, the recognition of the negation of that state, of its inevitable breaking up; because it regards every historically developed social form as in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence; because it lets nothing impose upon it, and is in its essence critical and revolutionary".\*

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\* Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, Moscow, 1974, p. 29.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### IDEALS OF THE SENSE OF WRETCHEDNESS

*... And therefore we admire  
what thou dost foist upon us  
that is old.*

SHAKESPEARE

#### THE QUEST FOR A WAY OUT

But does nihilistic criticism offer any affirmative conclusions? Does not the person who unequivocally shares its views condemn himself to defeatism? Nihilism rejects these assumptions on the grounds that to think in such terms is to have a biased notion about it. How then is the transition from destructive criticism to an affirmative programme effected?

Nihilism asserts that everything genuinely human, natural, free and unfabricated is asocial. Therefore to seek reconciliation with capitalist society means betrayal of one's own self, while war with it is madness. Nihilism's slogan is "Neither war nor peace". But since man cannot live outside society he allegedly cannot, on the strength of this alone, be entirely free and happy; it would be better if capitalist society's imaginary freedoms and substitutes of happiness had not existed. In the view of nihilism, the task, consequently, is that it is necessary to learn to live in capitalist society in such a way as to feel as little of its oppression as possible; without severing all social links, one must be able to break loose from the power of the alienated, irrational world, which is devoid of any gleam of hope and future, for which it could be worth fighting, working, loving and suffering.

It is only by leaving in order to remain that one can hope to break free from the tenacious embrace of capitalist society. It was difficult, nihilism says, to tread the road to Calvary, to endure the foregoing revelation that the

world was absurd: it is now necessary to be able to endure the realisation of one's own division. One must be able to cut away and isolate that part of one's consciousness that is occupied by forces emanating from society. Man must know that in his association with other people he is speaking an alien tongue; that his attachment to persons, things and ideas is not his own; rituals, customs, aspirations and ideas—still less his own—they all belong to society and are dictated by it by means that tolerate no objection. This is the part that must be submissively given to its actual owner: Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. This is tormentingly difficult to do. But one cannot count on shaking off the ashes of suffering. A common language, a form of reconciliation with it must be found. This is the only way one can wring a particle of inner freedom—such, after all these arguments, is the conclusion drawn by nihilism.

Thus, according to the affirmative programme, nothing changes in the external world. And perhaps there is even no need for breaking away from the stable way of life. Attention is directed towards change only in the spiritual sphere. Grandiose revolutions are to take place only in the area of the experience of perceiving the world. For the sense of wretchedness, whose favourite nihilistic mythology is, acquired freedom means nothing more nor less than to experience one's wholeness. It is attainable provided one becomes aware of oneself as a person, as a member of the human species, and not as a man of the organisation that imposes incompleteness, mutilation and the miserable fate of a functionary. But the flight from history and anonymous existence is accomplished not to some new world, not in the direction of other social links. For nihilism there is only one channel of emigration—into oneself. It regards freedom as a retreat into the asocial past, into the depths of history, into mythology.

Special ways of experiencing inner freedom are worked out in the process of resistance to the technocratic paradise, to its stereotype ideals that are forced upon the individual, suppressing his own aspirations and stimulating in him unnatural requirements and desires. In the long run resistance leads to the expression of own convictions and ideals.

As nihilism sees it, an individual projected extraneously remains in the grip of a torn, distorted and therefore sick consciousness. An intraneously projected individual is allegedly able to balance the painful disagreement of ideals with reality. Having shed his ideals and correspondingly "transformed" reality in his subjective perception, this individual in one way or another finds the key to harmonising them. This gives him the impression that he has acquired the state he has longed for. He believes that he has at last restored his uniqueness, shaping himself in accordance with his own understanding and desire. The meaning of life and happiness, lost in social existence, are allegedly acquired in wisdom and in the ever-lasting joy of the sense of participating in it. Such, in general outline, is the reasoning of the sense of wretchedness.

Stopping at no barriers, nihilism gives the impression of totally demolishing official ideals and the prevailing mythology. However, in the final act it finds that the absence of ideals is as unbearable as submissive acceptance of official ideals when one sees their glaring incompatibility with reality. While the sense of contentedness uses its ideals to consolidate itself more firmly in its contented state, the sense of wretchedness does its best to break out of its state, adapt itself to the oppressive world and deliver itself from suffering, at least in its initial form. What it wants are not the ideals of unhappiness but ideals leading to the attainment of happiness, with deliverance from optimistic delusions and surrender to evil, the ideals which would at least give the sensation of having escaped from the impasse of hopelessness. Thus, after withering criticism, nihilism gets down to the unaccustomed work of producing moral matters and moral values\* that would suit the sense of wretchedness and tie in with reality, albeit negatively.

These ideals or, rather, anti-ideals, among which are the neohedonistic hopes of the sense of contentedness, are formed of definite thought material, that is to some extent approved by history. This material is placed around some basic idea, concept or pivotal value. Structurally it is an

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\* John K. Forrest, *Reality or Preachment. The Moral Crisis of Our Time*, Boston, 1967, p. 203.

intricate frame consisting of stereotype behaviour patterns, value-norm orientations, and socio-political, moral and aesthetic notions, preferences and views of the meaning of life and happiness. This thought material has for nihilism the invaluable advantage that while constantly repeating itself and being undeducible directly from social reality it is the result of the spiritual output of all class-antagonistic social systems, including the earliest system, the product of the spiritual activity of man as a social being generally, and not as a member of any specific social organisation. Reflecting some general features of class society's life, the material used for the production of ideals creates the illusion that it and the way of action recommended by it are not dependent on time, on the spirit of change, that the set of ideals of the human tragicomedy is constant under any social circumstances and able to move easily from one epoch to another.

These ideals may lose their supremacy, acquire new foundations and correct the models of happiness, plans and programmes, and some behaviour patterns. For some time they may even be in, so to say, a state of anabiosis, and regarded as purely ritual, disengaging themselves from the actual vital activity of the individuals endeavouring to remain faithful to them. Nevertheless, like the eternally dying gods of ancient religions invariably brought to life again, they do not vanish completely, reinforcing the illusion that certain requirements of the human spirit are constant.

Of a venerable age and having passed through ideological and cultural selection and acquired a large reserve of strength, the halo of consolidation in experience, these ideals are merely appropriated by the sense of wretchedness, to some extent customarily and even mechanically reproduced by it. The latter circumstance does not prevent, of course, each individual consumer of these ideals from believing that they are the fruit of his own, unguided independent creativity.

How is this illusion reinforced? By the fact that the traditional ideals called up by nihilism for good are not, strictly speaking, theoretically polished, systematised conceptions. As we already know, they are to some extent the vapours, the echoes of an actual vital process, of spontaneously formed

moulds of the specific conditions of people's existence, of their way of life. The social orientation and morals in these loose ideals, and the entire ideological practice of the sense of wretchedness coalesce with definite frames of mind, with a special organisation of feelings, with an inimitable tonality of emotional accompaniment.

Each of these ideals expresses the way of thinking of social sub-types of the common bourgeois social and class type of individual. It expresses his inter- and inner-individual esoteric language. Each generates a specific and many-sided complex of mobile emotional states from calm but stable to turbulent, albeit transient, passions, including such that are temporarily able to lessen the burden of negative feeling (anxiety, fear, despair, a sense of oppression) and transform them into affirmative states with a veneer of optimism (satisfaction, joy, tranquillity). Shape is thus given to an autonomous system in which affirmative and negative emotions interact, temporarily fostering a sense of self-realisation of the individual and strengthening the ideal's attractiveness.

As outlets the sense of wretchedness uses quietist, stoic and anarcho-ascetic ideals (the list of ideals and their varieties is much longer). They are united into something of the nature of a single whole by their hostility for the optimistic scientific world outlook (and the corresponding stereotypes of the perception of the world) and by their futile attempt to rise above the antithesis between bourgeois and socialist ideals.

### Quietism

Quietism is a typical practical philosophy and mass frame of mind of the sense of wretchedness. Stunned by bourgeois society's brutality and his own ability to lose his human nature in its web, the quietist understandably proceeds from the belief that it is futile to try to improve life. Hence the conclusion that one should not intrude too far into it. Recognition may only be given to serene spiritual tranquillity, to blissful indifference to everything, to the paralysis of the will as the general aim of all efforts. Quietism believes that happiness is acquired in the process of subversive action, transformations, cares and responsibility of any kind.

But various biological and social requirements hinder the attainment of the quietist ideal. For the quietist the task is, consequently, to reduce requirements to the necessary minimum, to the most elementary needs.

But will not this self-restriction bring new suffering? At first, yes, but it will be subsequently removed, quietism replies. Only such suffering will remain as does not depend on the will of the individual who, however, is comforted by the awareness of his non-implication in suffering coming from without, and has learned to regard it from without, so to speak. For quietism it is important to cut the thousand threads of desire, to prevent the sinking of roots in life because every root forms a link to something, imposes obligations, and demands practical steps. What it wants is to minimise vital manifestations bound up with the external world.

Essentially speaking, by saving feelings and desires, by suppressing passions it seeks to exclude actions leading to universally accepted and socially approved careers. To be a quietist in our day means to be a person with effaced social qualities, a person who has abandoned the consumer race and does not desire a social status an iota above the average level. If the quietist renounces blind belief in social myths, in official morality, in its hypocritical "sacrosanct" principles and the ensuing ideas about man's destiny, if he does not believe in the theories of progress, evades contact with any social movement and keeps away from the extraneous ideological onslaught, it is relatively easy and even natural for him to stop desiring what capitalist society offers him. In order to be free, the quietist argues, one has to rid oneself of social roles, of alienated labour, of social activity, of affiliation to any community.\*

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\* In bourgeois sociology the behaviour pattern inspired by the quietist ideal is often called retreatism. People who deny the predominant orientation and its aims and institutional means are regarded as eccentrics, aliens, defeatists, self-removers from the organisation, or its fictitious members (see Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, Glencoe, Illinois, 1961, p. 153). One may agree with these characteristics but for the fact that it is neurotics, renegades, tramps and chronic alcoholics and drug-addicts who are bracketed first with defeatists. This approach is limited and vague on account of the efforts to explain the world outlook as dependent on personal success or failure and give it primarily a bio-psychological interpretation.

In order to facilitate the attainment of his ideal and safeguard it against excessive pressure from circumstances, the quietist has to reckon with at least some elements of surrounding reality, preferring to pursue his ideal secretly (the exceptions are, perhaps, hippies, to whom quietist aspirations are not altogether alien), to take cover behind respect for accepted symbols, consumer-hedonistic ideals and their key commandment—"be as everybody else". For that reason the quietist attitude frequently harmonises with undisguised pragmatism, with attachment to extreme practicality. Man works somewhere and, when necessary, feigns participation in the life of society and discharges his duty to his family and friends. However, he does not immerse himself in this extraneous, visible existence and does not dissolve in social ties. Much, and sometimes very sophisticated, effort is required to obtain or rather wring the right of asylum and, at the same time, to remain at a standstill, to be a Robinson Crusoe on a densely populated island. Loneliness is turned into a virtue that is seduced only in sharp, conflict situations.

But what will happen to mankind if all people acquire this virtue, if they relinquish the "burden" of responsibility? However, the highest meaning of the quietist state lies precisely in being indifferent to questions of this kind, especially when the certainty exists that the mass at large is not threatened with the loss of sociality (the covert élitism of this ideal is seen in particularly sharp relief in this part of the quietist argument). Compassion for others is all that the quietist can afford, secretly believing that even this is futile; when one person wishes to help another, both are, to quote an old fable, like freezing porcupines who, wishing to be warmer, press closer to each other with the result that they prick each other more painfully with their needles. Since for the quietist there is no other way of bringing people together except by forcibly uniting them, the only road left is that of circumspectly chosen loneliness ("the human community is simply unbearable!") and, consequently, helplessness. In this case freedom becomes cognised helplessness.

The world, in which the quietist believes he really lives, only moves past the actual world at a tangent, past the world of people with their concerns, anxieties and stresses. (These states, of course, may be of varying significance.

Anxiety and stress are also created by the pursuit after success. But they may also be evoked by a sense of responsibility for the destiny of the world, or by hatred of evil.) On the contrary, the imagined world, in which the cherished part of the quietist lives and where his ideal lies, is represented as filled with calm and self-satisfaction. History passes through it as through a vacuum. In it one acquires quiet happiness, has modest joys close to prostration, and finds delight in resignation to destiny and tranquillity in the knowledge of one's helplessness to change the world for the better. Here, with the aid of trick phrases, they easily combine what cannot be combined, and are intoxicated by understanding entirely cut off from action. Here all causes have strictly envisaged effects, opening singularly agreeable horizons entirely dependent on the imagination. Here one can calmly engage in creative work—science, art, philosophy, religion—without being a clerk to science, a priest or a paid artist. Here, at last, anger, despair, anxiety and concern are allayed, and one is not tortured by thoughts of evil, need, social programmes and responsibility. In this invented world one can turn away from the blinding light of reality. Here the quietist can take as his model a person with a passion for depressive hobbyism, a follower of the Schopenhauerian teaching of Nirvana, Somerset Maugham's personage who fled to Hawaii, or a white-collar worker who shuns a career.

The quietist thirsts for estrangement. Lifeless life is an end in itself, the final goal of the quietist orientation. One should not identify the quietist's striving for repose with the analogous aim of practical medicine. Auto-training, requiring distraction from unpleasant, worrying thoughts and persistent passions, is prescribed when emotions leading to over-excitement or inhibition are accumulated. In this case auto-suggested repose and the removal of neurotic reactions and mental instability are in the realm of psychotherapy. Quietism, on the other hand, is not a method of treatment but a platform demanding calm everywhere and always, chiefly when responsible decisions and actions are socially vital. It strives for serenity of mind in an epoch of radical social change, of unparalleled tension and struggle of passions, when silence and inaction have acquired a sinister meaning and represent an unambiguous choice. "Indifference,"



Lenin wrote, "is tacit support of the strong, of those who rule."\*

At a time when in capitalist society people are fleeing from contentedness in panic, when disappointment and doubts are imperatively demanding a quest for a way out, quietism lies in wait for victims, suggesting a ready-made and allegedly historically tested way out of wretchedness. Back to ataraxy, it says. Away with rotten reality, with obscure relations with nature, society and mankind, with instrumental actions, with the oppression of things, with mystification. But where are people to go? To the world of spiritually restored spectral links, unrestricted freedom and integral characters. All these alluring promises are associated with tranquillity, with tacit nihilism, with a departure from the bustle of life, with contemplation, spiritual equilibrium, the attraction for which allows quietism to collect an abundant haverst from the sense of wretchedness.

### Stoicism

Like the quietist ideal, the stoic ideal unfolds its provisions on the basis of nihilistic tenets. According to the stoic principles, man has not the least hope of changing the world that is hostile to him. The exponents of stoicism declare that ideals founded on such hopes are spectral and can bring nothing save camouflaged bondage: orientating people on fortuity they deliver their adherents from suffering only hypothetically, for on fortuity depends only the form of suffering.

These common features of attitudes do not prevent the stoic from being critical of the quietist ideal. Devoid of the spirit of protest and struggle, the latter, according to the stoic, is humiliating by its submissiveness to fate with its "without us" motto. In its original form this escapist ideal mirrors nothing less than fear of action. In its extreme conclusions, quietism is a mitigated form of suicide, when spiritual death precedes physical death. This ideal's assurances about the development of freedom and the preservation

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p. 79.

of the individual's integrity are cowardly and demagogic, to say the least. Fear is the lot of slaves. Fear that prevents recognition of the world's absurdity and the falsity of any optimistic incantations, or fear that compels people to seek salvation in flight and to surrender to the world's severity paralyses the heroic in man and leads to amorality by various paths. Such is the stoic assessment of the quietist ideal.

Stoicism claims that it has the secret for preserving freedom and promoting the individual's integrity outside and in spite of history. It argues that a person who has understood that his fate is ill-starred is capable of holding it and all fatal prophecies in contempt. Such knowledge of oneself, acquired by intuition rather than by discursive analysis, allegedly helps the stoic to rise above fate and surmount misery. Man, he says, derives comfort and, in a certain sense, happiness from self-discipline, from the constant mobilisation of his will, from heroic effort that enable him to free himself from routine. But no hope, the stoic asserts, can be derived from a scientific knowledge of the world, from history, or from a prevision of the future. He enjoins upon people to have the courage to admit that they do not believe in the laws of history, in political utopias or the unfurling banners of any ideology. Proper behaviour cannot be deduced, he contends, from social need, from expediency of any kind, and much less from accepted standards. But do not despair! The perspective, the anti-fate must be created by inner effort and realised in the discharge of duty, which in a certain sense "invents itself". As a magic wand, moral intuition prompts the content of that duty. The stoic believes that the fulfilment of this duty under the most onerous and discouraging circumstances enables people to acquire self-respect, dignity, grandeur of spirit and, consequently, self-satisfaction and true contentedness devoid of naïve faith in social welfare and historical insurance, for history is not *deus ex machina*, it offers man nothing.

The stoic believes that the advantage of his armoured isolationism is that there is nothing he can be deprived of that can reduce him to a state of fear or unhappiness. Whatever is affected by alienation (things or even life itself), his shield is his belief and faith that he can do with-

out what is taken away from him. Delivered from bondage to passion and lust, the stoic is thus also rid of the vain and, at the same time, naïve desire that everything should bend to his will; on the contrary, he wants things to go their own way. He is prepared for any defeat, despite his—so it seems to him—ideological and psychological superiority over any adversary; equally, he is prepared for victory, which can change nothing. It is asserted that only he is free who is always prepared to die, not by suicide but in the performance of his rigoristic duty with unshakable conviction and in accordance with the inexorable injunctions of self-discipline. Thus, for the stoic, there is happiness only in not wishing happiness, in any case such as would in some way depend on somebody's arbitrary will—society or an individual. The happiness desired by the stoic must include not deliberate renunciation of, but scorn, reinforced by habit and training, for the blessings of life. It must be founded entirely on inner purity and conviction. Virtue is not a means of attaining happiness; it is exclusively an end in itself. The stoic believes that happiness lies in philosophical calm and tension, in surmounting fear of the vicissitudes of life, of the tragedy of existence, and of death. The new attitude evolved by man towards suffering, the stoic says, gives meaning to the fearless confrontation with fate in the hostile environment of the technosphere, institutional structures and the orgy of consumption.

Let us consider these arguments. First there is the question: What is the purpose of fighting to preserve the individual's independence against pressure and manipulation by the social organisation in pursuance of the duty to disobey and disagree with society? For the sake of self-contemplation? Abstract freedom for its own sake? Especially as the purpose of effort can under no circumstances be turned into a means of social development in a definite direction: the stoic is indifferent to the fate of absurd capitalist society.

However, stoicism leaves a slim ray of hope from the belief, and nothing more, that individual perfection can stop progress, beneficially influence the social arrangement, although historically this belief in the correction of the mass consciousness, in its avalanche-like mutation, in the emergence of a new frame of mind and in easing the spiritual

atmosphere of the epoch cannot be proved. This only weakens but does not destroy anti-historical nihilism, for how is it possible to change the world for the better when all the calls for self-command demand the elimination of historically founded action perceived as the basic indication of non-independence, as a sort of contented slavery, dependence on enfeebling morals? How can the world be changed for the better when all efforts are reduced to adaptation in critical, borderline situations, to their acceptance through immunity to suffering, to changes in the inner state of mind and in human relations that can allegedly be made independent of changes in property and political relations?

Worst of all is that the attractive aspects of stoicism, its elements of heroism and absence of falsity, appeal to those who, by virtue of their high morals and strong will, could be particularly useful in the struggle for the lofty ideal that harmonises closely with the course of history. By putting forward notions about what the individual must be like in the epoch of calamity, upheavals and cynicism, stoicism robs the revolutionary forces, and by preventing this individual from adopting a consistently democratic and humanist attitude does not let him do what is most important, namely, to surmount the tragic state of helplessness, understand how to deal with the agonising world of the absurd and find the outlet for mass social action.

### Anarcho-Asceticism

Anarcho-asceticism, a form of hope-inspired active nihilism,\* is closely linked with the stoic and, partly, the quietist ideal in life. Relative to these ideals it sometimes performs a pedagogical and ritualistic role in accordance with the original meaning of the word (in antiquity it meant merely training the body and will, i.e., exercises, and not a cult of sacrifice and self-torture).

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\* The link between the ideal of the stoic sit-down strike against history and the ideal of rebellious asceticism is examined by E. Y. Solov'ev in "Existentialism and the Frankfurt School", *Uoprosy filosofii*, No. 4, 1975.

At the same time, anarcho-asceticism is independent, not at all necessarily in its most familiar, religious variant. As in the case of stoicism and quietism, it is guided primarily by the nihilistic vision of the world, believing that it is possible, chiefly through spiritual self-restructuring, to avoid all the theoretical and practical effects and conditions stemming from this vision.

In all its postulates the anarcho-ascetic ideal is, above all, anti-consumer, a contrast to hedonism. Hence its forthrightness and even crudeness, that liken it to its antipode. Its logic is utterly simple: within the framework of social organisation life brings man nothing save suffering; in face of it the individual and all mankind are helpless; the only way out is to reassess suffering; a new attitude to suffering that can elevate man must be worked out on the basis of this reassessment; the attitude to suffering must be such as to facilitate the activation of creative initiatives, open man to compassion and lead to moral renewal. According to this logic, in assimilating a definite type of culture the individual finds himself helpless before the Trojan horse of social influence and subjected to behaviour patterns and bans alien to him. That is why for anarcho-asceticism the alpha and omega of independence lies in allergic antipathy for culture, social values and forms of association, i.e., in nihilism. Whereas to achieve stabilisation and prosperity bourgeois society is prepared to sacrifice true culture for culture serving such stabilisation, anarcho-asceticism is prepared, in token of protest, to sacrifice true culture in order to destroy conformist pseudo-culture. In the opinion of anarcho-asceticism, all bridges to society must be burnt, in the most shocking way if necessary.

Anarcho-asceticism recruits supporters chiefly from among young people, particularly students, from among those strata of the urban population that urbanisation and the capitalist form of progress have dislodged from traditional forms of existence (former peasants, artisans, small shop-keepers, backward segments of workers, immigrants, the inhabitants of slums, and so forth), and from among people subjected to racial and national oppression. It recruits supporters not simply from among misfits and derelicts, who are generally more attracted by quietist hopes, but from among those who

have preserved the spirit of protest and insubmission. Anarcho-asceticism's vital guidelines stir these people, inducing them to begin a conscious struggle against bourgeois society. This contains the realistic possibility of joining democratic movements and adopting new views.

This was pointed out by Frederick Engels when he drew a distinction between plebeian and proletarian asceticism, on the one hand, which was directed against inequality reigning in society, a form of protest against the luxury and idleness of the ruling classes, and bourgeois asceticism, on the other, which was a manifestation of philistine cupidity and greed.\* However, asceticism's spirit of protest and rebellion should not be exaggerated. With the development of the proletariat's class-consciousness it increasingly plays a negative moral and political role, camouflaging passiveness, diverting people from the struggle and channelling energy solely towards moral self-improvement, towards the struggle against one's own nature.

It is, however, able to attract also people from the privileged strata. It is particularly attractive to some young people from well-to-do families who do not desire a technobureaucratic career. These people are impressed by the radicalism of its projection beyond the ordinary, its cult of barrenness, its ban on contact with official bourgeois culture, its state of psychological exaltation and political confusion. Despair becomes a magnet. They furtively cast envious glances at their anarcho-hedonistic brothers. They regard the aim of immediate destructive action, of setting up an anachoretic anti-community\*\* as the operational reply to the need

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\* See Frederick Engels, *The Peasant War in Germany*, Moscow, 1965, p. 62.

\*\* With its architecture (in reply to the madness of the megalopolises), system of diet (as a reaction to the official myth about health), decentralised management (as the alternative to bureaucratic centralism), and petty crafts and small enterprise (in opposition to conveyers and the mammoth corporations, rationalised labour discipline and falsification of goods). In these modern self-governing phalansteries there is no ideological control, morals are replaced with the simplified rules of small communities, while art gives way to pop-art and sex cults. The experience of their existence has borne out the non-viability of the anti-communities: they have either disintegrated quickly and

for action, for giving an outlet to spontaneous energy, a form of satisfying their impatience and reassessing "direct action", on the one hand, and a form of satiating their desire to flaunt despair, "to be unique", to stun, to be demolishers, on the other. They have broken away only from the direct influence of bourgeois ideology but found themselves stuck in social weightlessness.

Thus, under one and the same umbrella of anarcho-asceticism there are two different streams, two frames of mind. They are induced to strive for the same ideal by different motives, and for that reason despite their mutual infection they have different outlets to practice and the further evolution of views. One of these outlets we have already noted. The second (attracting social dregs who have succumbed to corruption) erupts as active nihilism and renunciation of organised action against the capitalist social system as such.

Consistent fulfilment of ascetic-nihilistic injunctions leads to ultra-anarchism. In the demoralised consciousness the negation of the capitalist system, bureaucracy, mass technology, conformist morals and law, the official religion, the sense of contentedness, and also quietist estrangement as passive reaction to alienation and imagined means of restoring freedom and originality, develops into a savage rebellion. However, its purpose is not to overthrow the bourgeois system, for to do this it has to be orientated on considerable social forces, on organising, uniting and educating these forces, on understanding the prospects for the struggle, which is categorically disallowed by nihilism's fundamental postulates. For that reason the aim is only to shatter the system, to disorganise it as far as possible. It urges pulling down everything—institutions and the family, corporations and schools, parties and banks, trade unions and social insurance agencies—everything in sight.

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painfully, or degenerated (with the emergence of their own social structures, leaders, exploitation, and so on). As regards a complex and multi-faceted social phenomenon such as "alternative culture" or "counter-culture", the Marxists point out that this movement has real possibilities of joining the general democratic, anti-imperialist forces (A. Y. Melvil, "Counter-Culture. Its Evolution and Modern Critics in the West", *Uoprosy filosofii*, No. 8, 1974; *Marxism Today*, Nos. 9 and 12, 1973; Nos. 3, 9, 10, 11 and 12, 1974, and Nos. 1, 2 and 4, 1975).

What is the purpose of this obstruction and destruction? Steeped in anarcho-asceticism, nihilism knows only what it does not want and is incredibly uninformed about what it wants. The spirit of insubordination and resistance to responsibility cannot, however, replace a well-considered affirmative programme, or a scientific analysis of the objective laws of social development, or systematic work to achieve the aims of the struggle, aims which nihilism interprets without discernment. Although it waits for the "great day", it does not know how to muster the forces to create great events. Besides, he who strives to get everything in order to avoid nothing most surely remains with nothing.

Anarcho-ascetic nihilism stigmatises non-mutinous behaviour pattern and ways of thinking equally as time-serving. This brings it to the simplified dilemma: either conformist contentedness with an apologetic attitude to bourgeois reality, or active non-conformism springing from the sense of wretchedness. In its striving to destroy, this nihilistic ideal calls down on the capitalist system's head crises capable of paralysing it in many ways. But from these crises (economic, military, political, cultural) it expects not changes for the better but mainly abstract confirmation that it is right. The anarcho-ascetic ideal is antipathic not only to the bourgeois regime but also to any other social system and, consequently, to the organised political mass struggle, which it regards as an alienating force, as usurpation of freedom. Anarchic nihilism says: Fight, but on no account dare to win, for "revolutions are truths only as processes, but they are most certainly false as regimes".\* It even goes so far as to try to use impulsive revolutionary enthusiasm against the revolution, and is prepared to destroy everything except the actual foundations of bourgeois society.

Being a transformed variety of social helplessness, anarcho-asceticism derives satisfaction not so much from abnegation of career, prudence and the blessings and pleasures of consumer society as from the spirit and acts of subversion, scandalous insubordination and improvised protests. Its excited state of mind and actions of this kind that some-

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\* Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Les aventures de la dialectique*, Paris, 1955, p. 279.



times come near to vandalism and accentuatedly primitive forms of satisfying physiological needs, contain and manifest something in the nature of a morbid, pathological and neurotic delight in destruction. Both nihilism and the forms of "surmounting" it are taken to extremes, beyond which lie only suicide or madness. There is much truth in the reproach hurled by a stoic at a rebellious ascetic: "You must remember that even a rebellion can reduce you to a state of thing!"

It should not be forgotten that anarcho-asceticism easily degenerates into anarcho-terrorism. The purpose of its political excesses (assassinations, provocations, abductions, acts of terrorism by "urban guerrillas", and retribution against apostasy in its own ranks on the basis of the gangster moral of collective guarantee) is to whip up social tension and goad the philistine's fear of its possible effects, with the result that these excesses have the destructive force of mosquito bites only relative to the system it wants to reduce to ruin. In all other aspects they are not so harmless or, in any case, their negative effects are much greater than the directly calculable social and moral losses.

In addition to the fact that they infect social consciousness with the germs of social unruliness, fanaticism and brutality, giving an example of a smooth transition from ultra-revolutionarism to links with the criminal world (for example, the evolution of the notorious group led by Andreas Baader and Ulrika Meinhoff), it is important to take into account the point that these excesses give the conservative political forces the possibility of making capital out of the "anarchist threat", to lay it on thick by depicting them as the self-exposing strategy and tactics of the entire Left camp, notably of the Communists. On this foundation conservative policy seeks to inflame annoyance and fear among the philistines, worried by the frequent spasms of various crises (from economic to ecological), their nostalgia for the "good old days" of stability and, as a consequence of these moods, prevent them from supporting ideas calling for a radical social and political reorganisation of society.

Moreover, experience shows that Right-extremist, neo-fascist elements hasten to use any advantageous situation. Their ears pricked to catch changes in the feeling of the

middle strata, they act on the pretext of safeguarding immutable moral principles, depicting their activity as a "fore-sighted mission" of saving society from anarchism, which cannot be suppressed by the bourgeois parliamentary state with its consumer ideology and faceless technocratic leadership.

Such are the political effects of super-revolutionary anarcho-asceticism, becoming a factor splitting the democratic forces and a blind instrument of conservatism and extreme reaction.

### THE MORALITY OF "OUTLETS"

In dealing with the content of the traditional ideals used as "outlets" from pessimism, we have been underscoring the distinctive features of each of them. Let us now consider what they have in common.

The element uniting them lies in nihilistic postulates and inescapably affects their end conclusions. In compressed form the latter may be described as orientation of hope, guidelines and behaviour on self-change, on the remoulding of the consciousness, of ways of perceiving the world. These ideals leave this world to the mercies of fate: allegedly impenetrable to any practical efforts, the world has been and remains a realm of absurdities, irrationality and tragedy.

According to the logic of these ideals, let "scorned" practice move in any direction it likes, but the individual must engage in what lies within his power—the healing of his own tormenting discontent, inventing ideals to cure it and from time to time cursing alienating reality; or the individual has to accept the sceptical principle that all ideals requiring a reality that can be more easily understood and is more pliant to change are objectively unattainable.

Never before has the gulf between nihilism's ideals and reality been so wide, and never before have despair and inaction been so dangerous. This gulf has opened in an epoch when capitalist reality, no longer reasonable, has obviously become an anachronism covering its shoddiness and hypocrisy with sophisms and making believe that it has faith in itself, demanding the same from others. In other

words, the material conditions have matured for negating capitalist reality. Moreover, development has reached a point where the assertion of socialism has become a vital act of mankind's self-preservation. The realisation of the communist ideal, which stems from an analysis of all the contradictions and prospects of this reality, has become the central requirement of the epoch. But the process of removing the old form from social relations cannot be entrusted to supermen, who, whatever their merits, cannot attain the ideal on their own. Lenin wrote that "unless the masses are politically conscious, wide-awake and full of determination, no changes for the better can be brought about".\*

The world revolutionary process that is changing reality in accordance with the communist ideal is proceeding apace. The struggle is waged by the most advanced class of the age—the working class, around which are uniting other classes, strata and groups, in one way or another inclined towards such unity by their own interests.

It is therefore quite inadequate merely to note the gulf between nihilism's ideals and reality, because never before have the possibilities for closing it been so tangible as to-day. These possibilities are opened by the subjective factor, by the organisation, activity and consciousness level of the masses, by their political experience, social and psychological independence and stability, and by the wisdom of their leaders. The social activity of the anti-imperialist forces determines the rate and solidity of progress. The revolutionary consciousness taking shape today is well ahead of objective reality, in other words, it is being guided by the ideal that is yet to be translated into reality. A new orientation towards self-change in the course of revolutionary practice is being acquired.

The bourgeoisie opposes this consciousness not only with the philistine-minded mass, the sense of contentedness and its mythology. It also makes use of the sense of wretchedness and its ideals of inaction, of disunited individuals orientated on self-change outside revolutionary practice. This orientation cannot be examined in isolation from its historical context.

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 18, p. 127.

The sense of wretchedness does not usually deny the social inutility of its ideals, but to justify them it asserts that they are moral, humane and devoid of self-interest. However, in our epoch can there be morality and humanism that spring up exclusively on the basis of self-change, and are they really so purged of self-interest as they are made out to be?

We have already seen under what pressure the sense of wretchedness notes the incompatibility of its ideals with hedonistic-consumer aims. Whereas contentedness encloses conscience in the cellar of its consciousness and makes short shrift of it, the sense of wretchedness gives it prominence, holding that man should be guided not by the duty to abide by the moral principles and norms forced upon him by society, that he should not calculate before acting, but should act without calculation. Never mind if this action appears to be rationally unjustified, even absurd, or if it seems to be inspired by duty for the sake of duty; the main thing is that the subject of action should be aware of its living conformity to the will of conscience, to the ethics of the heart. Actions dictated extraneously, by institutionally approved aims and means, are worthless, the sense of wretchedness says; the merit of an action is allegedly determined entirely by the motives and not by official approval or by how far the end result conforms to its social utility.

How appropriate is this contrast? Formally it is not devoid of meaning. Opposition to the moral dogmatism, bombastic rhetoric and "sacrosanct" principles of the bourgeois sense of contentedness requires a critical attitude to "ours is not to question why"; it requires attention to the contradictions of duties, norms and happiness. Nihilism's ideals are not devoid of at least some anxiety, resistance to the yoke of moral alienation and the attractive striving to oppose the wave of immorality, assert personal staunchness and responsibility and jettison the prejudices of formal morality.

But as Thoreau noted, minor circumstances are sometimes as eloquent as a fly in a glass of milk. The question, as we later find, is not exhausted by a statement of formal contrasts. It would be naïve to deny the role of inner motivation and the purity of intentions, to ignore them when we determine the merits of an action. There are no morals with-

out conscience. But the complex problems of a correct social orientation of activity cannot be resolved solely by the mysticism of moral feelings. Similarly, without norms there are no morals. The voice of conscience is not a cry out of nothing. Its social nature is unquestionable. The task is to find the unity between moral feeling and reason and not to set them off against each other. Consequently, the question is formulated differently from how it is posed by the sense of wretchedness: subjective certainty in the righteousness of one's action (or inaction) is not enough to regard it as moral! The morality of an action, especially of the entire behaviour pattern, is ultimately determined by social usefulness—demolition of outworn forms of relations between people and the building up of new, loftier relations that open up the road to man's further intellectual and moral development. It is a fact that the "laurels of mere willing are dry leaves that never were green".\*

However, the basic tenet underlying the moral guidelines of nihilism's ideals is that there can be no balance between the effects of an action and historical necessity, and its social usefulness. Nihilistic postulates compel the sense of wretchedness to reckon solely with negative social reality. For that reason it regards the demand for reliance on historical necessity dictated by this reality as a highly suspicious guideline for understanding moral questions, asking if it does not contain a compromise with bourgeois reality.

In individual cases morality possibly contains something elusive that defies clear determination and social qualification. But morals that in principle scorn to ascertain their relation with life are highly dangerous, not, needless to say, because feeling and intuition as such merit disdain but only by virtue of the fact that by themselves they do not give the correct orientation to moral consciousness. "It is not enough for the doctor," Georgi Plekhanov wrote, "to sympathise with the condition of his patient: he has to reckon with the *physical reality* of the organism, to start from it in fighting it. If the doctor were to think of confining himself

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\* *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Oxford, 1945, p. 252.

to moral indignation against the disease, he would deserve the most malicious ridicule."<sup>\*</sup>

That is exactly what takes place. Nihilistic morals are finding they are helpless against consumer-conformist morals, which defend themselves with the same weapons they are attacked. Indeed, if in morality faithfulness to convictions is the main thing, while all kinds of convictions are equal and man allegedly does not bear responsibility for them, the morals of consumption and accommodation prove to be invulnerable. Can this morality be destroyed by half-hearted exhortations, examples and even irony without taking part in transforming the reality that does not cease generating it serially and on a mass scale? And is not this inability to quash contentedness a cause of despair?

The morality of nihilism, if all the sediments are removed and things are called by their names, asserts individualism as the sole mode of existence, and in this sense differs from consumer morality only by its mode of expression and means. Of course, the orientation on self-improvement, zealously preached by it, is a vital component of the struggle against moral impoverishment. But when it is directed at suppressing the swarm of desires it quite imperceptibly loses sight of the aims of struggle. In what does struggle for the sake of struggle differ from consumption for the sake of consumption? This guideline likens its proponent to a person who prepares himself for action but does not act, who musters his forces but hesitates not only to crush the enemy but even give the signal for the attack. Virtues become a sedulously guarded but unwanted treasure, and the struggle for them is no longer in need of optimism, proceeding most effectively behind closed blinds, in the darkness of the pessimistic view of the world. Far from breaking open the locks of loneliness, these virtues only strengthen them.

The guideline towards self-improvement logically leads to the idea of non-resistance to evil, for instead of orientating people on involvement in social conflicts it calls upon them to keep aloof from these conflicts. However, the wealth of moral experience has proved in practice that non-resistance to evil

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<sup>\*</sup> Georgi Plekhanov, *Selected Philosophical Works*, in five volumes, Vol. I, Moscow, 1974, p. 672.

is tantamount to indirect participation in it. There is only one way to do good (including self-improvement) and it is to fight evil. This requires that the individual solve intricate moral problems not taken from a textbook with casuistic examples but posed by life, by the course and logic of struggle. This requires combining expediency with humanity and harmonising ideals with the means of attaining them. Since there are very few stereotypes in this struggle, it requires moral creativity and sometimes temporary reliance on intuition, and risk without the backing of a clear-cut norm. But this is not legalised blindness and not fidelity to formal duty, because the proper road to good, the means of establishing unity between understanding and deed, can only be found in practice. A social determination of morality does not in any way eradicate the importance of conscience, freedom of choice and responsibility. It does not deprive virtue of the right to be an end in itself for the individual and does not make the striving for happiness the sole inducement to humanity. In addition to setting the boundaries of activity (which dissatisfies only the individualist, whom it prevents from attaining immoral aims), morality indicates the objectives of this activity: it both compels and induces. Morality is not so much a restricting as a stimulating factor. There is no morality outside independent creativity, and only comprehension of the social significance of morality allows assessing this individual creativity correctly.

The orientation on self-improvement with freedom in a vacuum as its aim places a taboo on conscious action aimed at remaking society. This orientation suggests that working people should learn to endure burdens of life staunchly. For the exploiting classes this orientation has a different ring, calling upon them to display presence of mind and courage in the face of doom and loss of perspective. Moreover, it suggests that individuals learn to rely solely on themselves, that they develop qualities vitally needed for participation in the competitive struggle and highly esteemed in the market of success. In serving individualistic aims, self-discipline becomes immoral, while self-compulsion becomes brutal and merciless not only to oneself but to others.

The orientation on self-improvement allows for the strategy of little good, precisely the strategy that nihilistic

morality angrily condemns in consumer morals. To say nothing of the fact that it signifies negativism relative to actions satisfying the main needs of social development, it is used (outside narrow personal relations) to smooth over the rough edges of individualism clearly sticking out of the ideals of non-action, giving them the hallmark of moderation and seeming harmony with humanism.

Today, as in the past, these ideals are not a life-giving spirit of epoch-making processes, but only a "hot-water bottle for individual minds".\* It is said that indignation is the muse of decent people. But evil cannot be defeated solely by incantations. The morality of nihilism orientates people on finding a quiet cloister, on withdrawing into themselves. It justifies social fatigue and decorous surrender in face of evil. The excited but inactive conscience goes no farther than abstract compassion.

But is this humanism? In our day perhaps only the drone does not vow fidelity to humanism. Whereas at one time in the ideals of nihilism there were some elements of humanism, today they have disappeared without leaving a trace. Pain for mankind's suffering has given place to the absolutisation of suffering, infinite exaggeration of its "educational" role and indifference to the actual suffering of actual people. Instead of fighting immorality they render concealed, subtle support to individualism, moral adventurism and the profanation of humanism. Instead of mobilising forces against the evils menacing mankind, they make an inventory of suffering, register it goad the forces of evil, urge non-resistance to it and shamelessly exploit the sense of danger; but such exploitation disarms, and is therefore just as dangerous. In criticising the idealisation of Lev Tolstoy's preaching of religious morality, Lenin wrote that the most direct and profound danger comes from approval or mitigation of "his 'non-resistance', his appeals to the 'Spirit', his exhortations for 'moral self-perfection', his doctrine of 'conscience' and universal 'love', his preaching of asceticism and quietism, and so forth".\*\*

Although the ideals of nihilism give the impression of bitterly attacking the capitalist present, they only personify the

\* Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 1, p. 496.

\*\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, p. 53.



past. In the modern sense of wretchedness the tendency towards replacing the ideals of the future with the idealised past has increased sharply. The source of this operation consists of quite real circumstances and the inducements stemming from them. The engagement in the reality of bureaucratically organised capitalism is accompanied by unremitting fits of acute nostalgia for the past, of elegiac longing for sentimentally embellished relations. Everything not subjected to the pressure of technologically developed systems, amassment, the corrupting influence of consumption, the oppression of the urbanist way of life, and spiritual and administrative manipulation is surrounded with the attractive halo of being strictly in good order.

Selections from the past for the creation of an image may range from pastoral arcadias, various models of antiquity or hierarchically organised feudalism to the romantically perceived time of free enterprise. But in practice the orgies of nostalgia end only with the injection of elements of non-conformism into behaviour with the purpose of giving a sensation of some real action against the brutal and utilitarian society.

Utopian sighs remain a romantic dream. One may speak endlessly of the need for "new ethics" based on the conclusions of anthropology and abstract reason, on the principles of non-violence and universal love. One may appeal endlessly for the development of intelligible and pedantic specialisation of humanitarian knowledge, and regard it as a counterbalance to the predominance of technology and the exact sciences. One may appeal for new cults of worship, for a humanistic reorganisation of mass consumption, for the recognition of the priority of "non-material elements",\* and even for a natural economy equipped with modern machinery. One may endlessly suggest, as a criterion of planning, "optimal human development and not maximal production".\*\* These appeals and suggestions have been and remain unrealisable wishes with fading innocence.

While formerly it seemed that with the toppling of an ideal into the past there was some hope of actually returning

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\* See Charles A. Reich, *The Greening of America*, London, 1970, pp. 292, 293.

\*\* Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope*, New York, 1968, p. 96.

to history's initial point devised by nature herself, to surmount the "fall from paradise" (anti-historical optimism of early bourgeois ideology most eloquently depicted in Voltaire's *L'ingénu* and Diderot's *Promenade de sceptique*), in our day the sad sense of wretchedness realises that paradise cannot be achieved. To say nothing of the fact that this consciousness that hopes cannot come true aggravates despair and contributes to the self-reproduction of nihilism, it is used for individualistic purposes as well. The speed with which the fragile utopias crumble leaves not even a remote hope that they can somehow influence people's minds and thereby give reality at least a weak impulse towards the desired changes. It is not possible to end reality's inability to transform under the impact of utopias. For that reason in our day the production and consumption of utopian images acquire a new mission and new motivations. This occupation is itself designed to bring satisfaction, the level of which rises with the fall of the theoretical and practical value of expended labour. The given work must somehow compensate for actual helplessness, for the inadequate satisfaction derived from the application of one's effort to matters of social importance, and mainly from the fact that the individual is excluded from revolutionary criticism.

The heightened interest in self-perfection, which itself expresses the objectively enhanced role played in our epoch by morals and moral means of regulating behaviour, is presented in a false light in nihilistic ideals. These ideals prove to be unable to show the class nature of morals. They do not embody the moral indignation that is part of the overall motivation for society's reorganisation by revolution. On the moral level, nihilism is driven by fear, not by moral protest.

Being nothing more than camouflaged individualism, these ideals regard as their principal enemy not the individualism of consumer morals but the moral of collectivism. That explains why the morality of nihilism is worried most of all by the fact that the working people are joining the actual struggle for freedom, in the course of which they evolve their own morals, their understanding of duty and responsibility. What it fears most is the spread of not hedonistic but communist ideals, which require unity between morals

and the social significance of behaviour, giving effect to this requirement in Marxism, in which are combined science, a moral code, a compelling logic of social development and genuine humanism.

### AT THE CROSSROADS AGAIN

The ideals springing spontaneously from the sense of wretchedness and evolved for it by ideologists are directed towards surmounting nihilism. But in the movement and vacillations of the bourgeois mass consciousness faith in these ideals consists only of intermediate planks. In the past, in periods when the mass could immerse itself in a state of lethargic hibernation, it took a long time to ascertain the actual significance underlying the avoidance of social practice, of revolutionary criticism, and the vulgar distortions of this criticism. However, in the epoch of capitalism's general crisis time is being tightly compressed, brimming over with events and changes. In situations witnessing acute conflicts it is extremely difficult to safeguard one's ideals, these secluded havens of consciousness, from extraneous influences. The sense of serenity and inner harmony vanishes quickly in these seemingly unassailable spiritual fortresses. The "quiet" happiness acquired with difficulty is not saved by either irony or impassiveness—the possibilities of auto-suggestion are limited after all! The force of tradition, either, does not help against the accelerated decay of the ideals of the sense of wretchedness.

Understandably, this does not concern separate individuals. The latter may get stuck on intermediate planks for a long time, even for the duration of their lives, giving preference to one of the suggested ideals of the sense of wretchedness or going from one ideal to another on one and the same level. Individual deafness to the demands of the epoch is not an exclusive phenomenon. But, to use Lenin's words, the sense of wretchedness should be regarded "not as something individual, not as a caprice or a fad".\* The point is that regardless of how the spiritual evolution of one or another

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 17, pp. 51-52.

individual proceeds, the sense of wretchedness does not disappear; on the contrary, it is reinforced as a result of the crisis of the sense of contentedness and has a definite functional commitment. As a mass phenomenon it is subordinated to the logic of its own development, and it is this logic and not various individual deviations that ensures the breakthrough to the end point. The consciousness of the individual is devoid of predetermination, but in the case of the mass consciousness the movement of logic is predetermined. While one wave runs through the entire cycle of movement from the sense of contentedness to the sense of wretchedness and then abandons it, new waves are generated that roll along familiar roads as though bewitched. No moratorium can be imposed on this movement.

From what does the movement of a new wave begin? What gives the impetus to the commencement of this movement from the ideals of the sense of wretchedness and what determines its orientation? The port of destination to which the navigation lights of this sense lead is contentedness, in other words, they lead to the initial point of the cycle. This completion of the Odyssey of the mass bourgeois consciousness is the most glaring evidence of its duality, of its mixed, contradictory wretched-contented character and the conditionality of its subdivisions. Further, it is an indication that the proponents of this mass consciousness vacillate continuously on the ideological level, and this vacillation is accompanied by changes in the frame of mind.

Equipped with nihilistic ideas and outlet ideals, the sense of wretchedness thus finds itself at the crossroads. It is being undermined from two directions. The dogmas of nihilism are indirectly destroyed by life itself. The present course of social life inexorably leads to the crystallisation of positions, sweeping away all dual and equivocal, tight-rope positions. Every sharp turn in the epoch of crisis intensifies demarcation, diminishing the possibility for long manoeuvring. When these turns occur, class sympathies gain the upper hand over all intermediate positions.

Besides, in the long run the ideals of nihilism reveal their inability to remove the predominance of negative emotions, tormenting anxieties, fear and alarm, in which, essentially speaking, their practical predestination lies. Having pre-

served at least a weakened capacity for self-criticism, it despondently finds that the calculation on escaping from hated reality, after paying the tribute due to social organisation, boomerangs as a miscalculation. After all changes its thinking and perception of the world remain bourgeois-apologetic, while its outlet ideals and behaviour guided by these ideals continue to be determined from without, and its anti-collectivism is used for dirty practical purposes.

True, the orientation on self-change gives the individual some scope for development and creates the impression that there is spiritual space for the rejuvenation of individuality, but hardly more than is given by adherence to the hedonistic-consumer ideals. This development is inescapably one-sided and perverted, for it robs the individual of the main thing—social activity and association with advanced philosophical and political views, with activity in which morality and humanity are implemented not by any imagined means, while the development of the individual becomes a factor of social improvement. Taking no serious interest in anything except saving the individual, the sense of wretchedness leads the individual to destruction. Compromise becomes humiliating surrender to materialisation, regulation and amassment. No effort of the spirit and no ambitions lacking an objective base can help to endure long duality, secure a sense of integrity and balance the disagreement between ideals and reality. Although the ideals of nihilism are not devoid of momentum and possess some strength, they do not as a whole afford lasting immunity. The crowds of enchanted people are thinning. Adherence to the ideals of nihilism is beginning to be not a sign of the individual's self-assertion but of poorly disguised evidence of stark fear of life and the cracking of the spirit. The grandiose change in the perception of the absurd world has proved to be hollow.

In addition to this reason, which stimulates the movement away from the sense of wretchedness, there is another important circumstance. State-monopoly capitalism is experiencing a growing need for affirmative and not negative ideals for the man in the street. Steps are being taken to strengthen the apparatus of suggestion, which tries to persuade the man in the street that nihilistic conclusions spring from

unfounded generalisations of various distressing events and phenomena, that the organisation's blunders and errors can be rectified, while the unhappy course of events can be reversed, that negative ideals should be left to snobs and unadapted individuals, and that the affirmative expectations of the masses should be strengthened. Without intensifying the spiritual manipulation of the masses and without cementing social consciousness on the basis of contentedness of official bourgeois optimism, communist ideals cannot be stopped from winning the masses.

Lastly, the deluding power of consumer ideals and the fact that it is difficult for the sense of wretchedness to oppose for any length of time the pressures of consumer-acquisitory ideology and the general spirit of pursuit after success must be taken into account. The moment one yields to it even partially, trust begins to be regenerated for the bourgeois organisation and contentedness is restored.

There is still another very important consideration. State-monopoly capitalism needs a certain counter-balance to consumer ideals. To this counter-balance is assigned the important role of a balancing shock-absorber in the increasingly more frequent cases when the entire organisation slides into a period of crisis and the entire system of early warning, anti-crisis barriers and stimulation of economic growth does not work with the expected efficiency. That is what happened in the early 1970s, when various crises almost simultaneously shook all links of the bourgeois social organisation. If business activity diminishes and the strategy of self-preservation and survival requires a saving of energy resources and raw materials, if inflation goes out of control and the living standard of large segments of the working people drops, the consumer ideology becomes a factor of exceedingly great irritation. In this situation the reserve echelon of ideals, guidelines, symbols and the corresponding language of moderate anti-consumer asceticism come to the forefront of spiritual life. Purified in advance of anarchism, they make themselves increasingly felt in the context of fashionable demands for a slowing down of the rate of economic growth, in the context of getting society used to the idea that consumer restraint must be exercised, that the ethics of unrestraint and consumer revolutions must be aban-

done in view of the worsening of the quality (and higher cost) of goods and services. This demand for contentedness with little, addressed virtually only to the working people and representing only new raw material for machines and mind manipulation, is accompanied, for greater conviction, with a guard of honour from the futurological forecasts of the end of the world,\* from the innumerable "scholarly" recommendations (for instance, that self-restriction is necessary to avoid ecological collapse, for the sake of protecting the environment), from slogans about improving the "quality of life", from moral imperatives to save the values of labour, and from demagogic calls for replacing the "gross national product" with "gross national happiness".

At first, the departure from the sense of wretchedness is half-hearted. This phase witnesses the formation of an ideal in life resting on partially nihilistic, semi-pessimistic and semi-optimistic premises. The reality around man continues to be pictured as hostile, as bringing crises, fear and despair. But, at the same time, it begins to seem that in some incomprehensible way this reality combines irrationality and reason, despair and hope that it is possible to realise positive expectations and emotions leading to both wretchedness and contentedness. The judgment that this world is a blessing, albeit in the long run, is regarded as quite realistic. The expression that everything is not what it actually looks like gives a good idea of the mixed opti-pessimistic view of the world. As a result of the work it does on itself in advance, the consciousness is adapted to reality, which continues to be regarded as alien to man. It would seem that links, that had seemed to be broken once and for all, are restored with history. Earlier criticised forecasts of the future seem to be acceptable. Hardly perceptible cracks and fissures appear in the monolithic wretchedness. And a sense of gratitude to the social organisation is revived. Although

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\* See D. H. Meadows, D. L. Meadows, J. Randers, W. W. Behrens, *The Limits to Growth. A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind*, New York, 1972. In the second report for this club members continue their examination of "conservative" and powerful nature as the cause of the frequent crises that hit the capitalist world today (M. Mesarovic, E. Pestel, *Menschheit am Wendepunkt*, Stuttgart, 1974, S. 19-20).

the attacks continue, the platform from which they are launched substantially changes. Only partial flight from social links is recognised as justified.

The new ideal of life includes some elements (mostly hiding the actual condition of the individual in capitalist society and emasculating the entire sense of nihilistic criticism of that society) of the ideals of the sense of wretchedness. Use is also made of elements of hedonistic-consumer ideals, including the anarcho-hedonistic variants of these ideals. The demand for calmness is borrowed from quietism, for courage from stoicism, for patience from asceticism, and for the removal of tension and for faith that it is possible to be happy from hedonism. There appears a fantastic, or rather, ugly and unstable conglomerate of guidelines that hardly fit into behaviour patterns and reflect the vacillation of the "new" state of the spirit. There appears a sense of wretchedness overshadowed by decorum and moderation, inclined towards apostasy, lessening the expansionism of its claims, and opposing a sober analysis of its own moods and feelings. The agent of the "new" state of the spirit must deflect the onrushing waves of perpetual crisis situations. It seems that this can be accomplished with nothing more than the hope implicit in man, hope that is as universal as patience, with the affirmative expectation always present in any person, with the feeling that salvation is round the corner.

In the bourgeois world hope thus intervenes in a most miraculous way. It is transformed not by the efforts to change and humanise the social conditions of life but by bringing to light its hidden reason, the attractiveness that can triumph in social relations. This faith is only verbally distinguishable from the traditional religious hope for recompense and happiness brought by consolation that dulls the sense of fear. The suggested ways of achieving this blissful state merely bring us to a mystical cryptogram. It is as difficult to find in it indications of how to act in order to instil hope as it is to distinguish Diana or Minerva in a virgin slab of marble.

But the path of bargains always follows an incline, leading to a further fall. For that reason in its efforts somehow to patch up its rents, the retreating sense of wretchedness is finding it difficult to gain a foothold on the given spring-



board. The "new" ideal is much too unstable to prevent the further slide and instructive metamorphoses on the road to contentedness.

Upon its arrival at contentedness the sense of ex-wretchedness brings "extremely unpleasant tidings", namely, that there is no salvation without a philosophically enriched and morally rejuvenated sense of contentedness. Naturally, the new contentedness proves to be less susceptible to direct suggestion. It cannot stomach the naïveté of the intentions and the crude bluntness of the myths of the sense of contentedness. At all costs it strives to consolidate its acquired ability to see the world unembellished, to preserve the inner freedom and independence of its judgments, non-manipulatability and moral seriousness in the sense it understood them. It wants to be contented by its own will, striving to ignore the unattractiveness of this "independence" in the press of ideological manipulation, where it voluntarily places itself. Further, it experiences something in the nature of pride in its independently made choice and transformation, in the critical attitude of its contentedness, and in the moderation of its optimism, which is void of an enthusiastic and elated attitude to what has become "its own" social organisation with its hedonistic-consumer ideals.

As it parts with its former attractions and feelings, the sense of wretchedness makes noteworthy discoveries. Beneath the crust of irrationality it suddenly finds a rational continent. Understandably, the suddenness of these discoveries is only relative. In the same way as the passage from contentedness to wretchedness is accomplished step by step, so is the reverse transfer gradual. The script of the return is not necessarily followed line by line; place is left for improvisation. As a rule, the first to change is the mood guided previously by the ideals of nihilism, and explosions of irritation and anger, and spasms of hatred occur less and less frequently. Although the old attachments still bring pangs of remorse, new opinions accumulate at the same time. Then new convictions take shape and ensure a certain integrity of feeling and understanding. The discovered continent becomes the mainstay for reconciliation with hateful reality. The negation of sociality is negated.

Man, reasons the sense of ex-wretchedness, is not merely in the world, is not merely cast into it and lives with it at his side, and his actions are not merely a succession of senseless acts. The world is not rushing from a state of bad to very bad and terrible. The majesty of man, says the sense of wretchedness in its vision of new landmarks, lies by no means in understanding helplessness and hopelessness. No, it is not from misfortune springing from this hostile world that man should draw the sense of his superiority over it, not from cowardly tranquillity and not from self-torture and other forms of dubious heroism, but from so-called "normal activity" inspired by trust for the bourgeois organisation.

Man, the sense of wretchedness continues to discover, does not stand on a road leading to nowhere. He is not stuck in borderline situations. No fatal crumbling of hopes awaits him. His life is not long drawn-out tedium, and the situation is by no means such as one knows that nothing comes or will come out properly and the work that has been started is nevertheless continued. It would therefore be absurd to parenthesise hope and acknowledge the aimlessness of steps designed as self-protection. Tiresome groaning is only a waste of time. The entire apologia of misfortune and evil is a peevish and bilious illusion, mass psychosis and emotional disorder. Reconciliation with the bourgeois world is allegedly the most reasonable line of action. Freedom is manifested not in conflict with this world but in concord with it, not in over-inflated responsibility but in the fulfilment of limited duties. Wisdom lies not in denying the given social order but in recognising its certain justification and reason, in the ability to see its inexorable advance towards perfection. Thus reasons the sense of ex-wretchedness.

The framework into which the activity and thoughts of the individual are cooped up by the state-monopoly organisation is no longer regarded by the sense of wretchedness as tormentingly narrow and systematically shattering talents. The domination of the bureaucracy in capitalist society no longer seems to be as dangerous as before. Its view now is no longer that bourgeois democracy is truncated and spectral, that control of mass behaviour is des-

potic, that morals and culture have degenerated very much, that freedom is declarative, the language of the mass media false, and the infringement on the dignity of the individual ruthless.

The sense of wretchedness is reshaping the familiar fables that had earlier lured it—about nature, technology, urbanisation, health, overpopulation, anthropological degeneration, and so forth. Its complex of despair, from which frightening, nerve-wracking details are being removed, is once again nothing more than the quiet complex of anxiety of the sense of contentedness. The crumbling of expectations comes to an end. In the last analysis, it is no longer so horrified as before by local wars, economic and political crises, class struggle, labour conflicts, unemployment, racial clashes, moral degradation and the disintegration of the family in capitalist society. It feels that after all it is possible to survive and find salvation.

The attacks on reformism and the illusions of liberalism are weakening and even fading. Nihilistic criticism no longer razes everything to the ground. On the grounds that the pendulum has swung too far it is becoming circumspect and is showing a willingness to curb passions, to abolish irreconcilable tendencies and to impose a fairly strict self-censorship. It no longer feels that the myths of industrial society should be publicly stigmatised or that the lacklustre monotony of the parade of that society's ideas should be abused. All that is needed is to renovate and re-embellish them. Everything it had formerly been saying about them must be cooled or, still better, retracted. The arguments and conclusions of the sense of contentedness, its hopes and widely-used clichés with their unconditional trust in the bourgeois social organisation no longer seem to be as naïve and one-dimensional as before. The sense of wretchedness believes that all that has to be done is to throw out vague notions, scientifically unsubstantiated conclusions, blunders and vague understanding, syrupy propaganda, excessive passion, and susceptibility to the patented factories of dreams, balsams and false hopes, and replace the mythological by a "genuine" apologia, and formal, poorly motivated optimism by properly "substantiated" and "free" optimism.

The scantiness of the sense of contentedness is seen only in its thoughtless attitude to theories and convictions, in the meagreness of its spiritual diet, and this defect, allegedly, can be easily remedied. The sense of wretchedness believes that this should be commenced with a struggle against the domination of ideology and the trouble-making influence exercised on the masses by irresponsible politicians, with upholding the "sober" perspectives and decisions worked out by technocratic prophets, by the intellectual mandarins of our times. The decisions and forecasts handed down by them will allegedly inspire faith that it is possible to deliver civilisation from its vices without the destruction of the great benefits it brings mankind, and yield a stunning regulating effect, making the world if not rational and entirely free of features of absurdity then at least moving towards rationalism. The sense of wretchedness is prepared to regard the present from a falsified future.

The barrenness of the protests, rebellion or struggle for freedom in the stuffy room of the neurotic mind thereby reveals itself once again. The logic of its evolution brings the sense of wretchedness to the conclusion that it must return to the slogans of "order" as the password to entry into the bourgeois social organisation. Moreover, this reformist diligence easily finds spheres for practical application. Reformism, it will be borne in mind, is not merely an ideological school: state-monopoly capitalism's enormous apparatus is engaged in ironing out "defects" and co-ordinating and giving effect to the corresponding decisions. Those desiring to participate in reformist activity in line with the prescribed ideological and business recommendations can find a sinecure in the higher or lower systems of the Establishment.

Reformist hopes help to weaken the sense of voluntary exile. The sense of wretchedness writes off its own misdoings and receives absolution. The memory of these misdoings is pushed into the backwoods of the mind. It tries to forget the Fronde period, the itch of criticism, repenting that it had succumbed to momentary weakness. The ideals of nihilism, which were regarded only recently as the highest achievement of the human spirit, are left to the mercies of fate.

Only some remnants of nihilistic views have survived. They are being made part of the spiritual arsenal as something in the nature of *prim conventionality*, i.e., reduced to how nihilism serves the sense of contentedness—as an affected pastime, proof of seriousness and respectability, an indication of independent and unorthodox thought, a supplement to new convictions that hardly tie in with actual behaviour. The past is not only something to be ashamed of; people find a certain pleasure in it as well, precisely because it is the past. Nothing has remained of the state of anxiety and alarm save ruins, emasculated dogmas, and a formal tribute. The misadventures of the bourgeois mass consciousness are approaching their logical end.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IN FACE OF THE NEW SOCIAL REALITY

*...Interest, the well-being, the happiness of every individual is inseparably bound up with that of his fellow-men.\**

#### THE FALL

As long as nihilism spreads its views only about modern bourgeois society, some fundamental aspects for understanding its essence remain obscured, although its actions against society as such in any form (sociophobia) and its negative attitude (that sometimes evolves into extreme hostility) to the genuinely revolutionary forces in that self-same bourgeois society not only arouse suspicion but lift the curtain over much of the mystery. However, the mystery is laid bare when nihilism's attitude to existing socialism is examined.

Nihilistic criticism constantly refers to the results of the socialist revolution in the Soviet Union, the experience of building the new society and its functioning and the prospects for its further development, making a kind of "analysis" of existing socialism. But the purpose of these references is not to conduct an impartial study of the complex objective laws of historical development. This it is unable to do without ceasing to be itself, without modifying the entire range of its principles. It pursues a different purpose altogether, that of persuading its disciples, supporters and involuntary victims that neither existing socialism nor the communist perspectives are acceptable to them in any way.

Of course, nihilistic criticism has to acknowledge that existing socialism is achieving impressive successes. It asserted itself under extremely difficult conditions, the most

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\* Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, Moscow, 1975, p. 245.

convincing evidence of which is given by the whole of modern history from 1917, the year the socialist revolution was accomplished in Russia, to the failure of the cold war. The viability of the new system is no longer questioned even by its most rabid enemies.

However, nihilism argues, worrying only about satiety (as it is inclined to call the well-being of the people) and endeavouring to achieve it, the socialist revolution is becoming deformed. The revolution, it contends, reaches its consummation with the betrayal of man, with the creation of yet another (and the worst) variant of industrialised, organised and stratified society. Alienation allegedly remains in it and, consequently, neither the sense of contentedness nor the sense of wretchedness disappears. The idea of communism, it concludes, has proved to be no more than a lost paradise, a grandiose utopia of our epoch, a mirage.

Criticism steeped in nihilistic ideas tries to prove that existing socialism brings no radical change whatever to human existence and does not solve a single key problem of mankind. We already know the content of these attacks: man's alienation from labour, technology, science, rationality, power and culture.

### **SOCIALISM AND THE NEW WAY OF LIFE**

The attacks on existing socialism are motivated mainly by the fact that by its very existence, by its way of life the new society is passing the final stern sentence on nihilistic ideas and serves as a living refutation of their primary principles and ideological and methodological guidelines. "Already today socialism exercises a tremendous influence on the thinking and sentiment of hundreds of millions of people all over the world. It assures working people freedom, truly democratic rights, well-being, the broadest possible access to knowledge, and a firm sense of security. It brings peace, respect for the sovereignty of all countries and equal interstate co-operation, and is a pillar of support to peoples fighting for their freedom and independence. And the immediate future is sure to provide

new evidence of socialism's boundless possibilities, of its historical superiority over capitalism."\*

That explains nihilistic criticism's all-out effort to distort the essence of the great historic changes being put into effect by the socialist revolution, to disparage and belittle their significance, to distort the character of the socialist way of life as a qualitatively new phenomenon in man's long and suffering-studded history. Small wonder that it mentions only in passing, as something of minor importance, the fact that in socialist society the exploiters have been expropriated, power has passed into the hands of the proletariat and all other working people, a new type of relations of production has been evolved, the antithesis between town and country and between labour by brain and by hand has been eradicated and a new historic community has emerged—namely, the Soviet people, a community founded on relations of friendly co-operation, unbounded trust and concord among all classes and nations.

These are the socio-economic and political changes that have led to the creation of the qualitatively new organisation of society. In that society man has broken once and for all with his former condition of a "private person" and become an equal member of various forms of true collectivism, of a free association of people controlling their social being, their own emancipated existence, and doing so for the purpose of their unhampered and limitless self-development. Man's destiny is no longer determined by the accident of class origin and class position, or by the whims of the market. From a faceless, mediated instrument of social progress man is becoming the highest aim of social progress. His dignity and destiny are today determined solely by his talents, labour and social activity that is consonant with social progress and whose intensity and purposefulness know no equal in the history of mankind, for it is based on cognised objective laws of history.

In socialist society production and state discipline, administrative, legal and moral guidelines and the entire mechanism of regulating the activity of people, which ni-

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\* L. I. Brezhnev, *Report of the CPSU Central Committee and the Immediate Tasks of the Party in Home and Foreign Policy, 25th Congress of the CPSU*, Moscow, 1976, pp. 13-14.



hilism attacks, are the social force guarding the interests of society and the individual. Social progress is being liberated once and for all from antagonistic forms. People realise in advance the need for maturing social changes, desire these changes, and before necessity overtakes them they change the conditions of their life in keeping with cognised laws of social development. It is becoming possible to convert social progress into progress for man, because in that society there no longer are class forces opposing imminent changes.

By assuring progress on the basis of social unity, of concordant free development of people, socialism has refuted anti-communism's favourite dogma that there is everlasting antagonism between man and the masses, between the individual and society, that they are mutually alienated, that evil is inevitable. By liberating labour from exploitation and collectively organising it socialism destroys the economic roots of labour alienation. The very process of labour and its product cease to be alien, to be torn away from the working people.

In socialist society the individual is no longer compelled to materialise, to dehumanise his relations with other people. He does not regard these relations as objects and means for functional use. He is not doomed to confrontation with himself, to using his energy and talents as the means of attaining unprincipled success (market orientation of the individual). He is assured the integrity of his consciousness on a foundation immeasurably more solid than ever before, and develops his activity as a responsible subject of history.

When in spite of all these facts nihilistic criticism counterposes an abstract model of socialism generally to socialist reality it only lays bare its predisposition for sophistry. This operation nullifies all the specific features of the historic process of socialist construction, that began mainly in medium- and even underdeveloped countries—the peasant character of these countries, the predomination in them of a landowner-bureaucratic organisation of labour and society, political despotism, the predominance of patriarchal relations and the cultural backwardness. The bitter struggle between the two world systems and much else

are obscured. Socialism's social practice is seen only as static. The balance between what has been and what remains to be achieved, and between prospects and problems yet unresolved is completely distorted. Far-fetched yardsticks are applied to historically shaped socialist society in order to belittle and disparage its actual historic achievements.

Nihilistic criticism cannot or, rather, does not wish to take into account the fact that socialist society only gradually begins to develop on its own foundation, to move from the early to the mature stage of its self-development. Naturally, socialism's advantages could not show themselves in their full stature at the initial phase. For example, in industry there was still an excessive division of labour and the percentage of arduous, non-mechanised labour was still high. The volume of extensive forms of economic growth was considerable. Factors were still in operation that hindered the consistent application of the principle of "from each according to his abilities, to each according to his work", and this prevented the elimination of all possibility of receiving unearned incomes (as a consequence of the technical and economic advantages of some types of economies, branches of industry and individual enterprises, the dissimilar fertility of the soil, the benefits from the territorial distribution of industries, the fluctuations of market prices, and in some socialist countries the relatively long preservation of elements of private enterprise). The rapid changes in the relations of production were only gradually—and sometimes much too slowly—realised in the development of the productive forces. There were still inadequate material conditions for removing the contradiction between the advanced relations of socialist ownership and the backward organisational and technical labour relations at factory level. Elements of formal socialisation of social production and social labour were still in evidence.

Furthermore, it is quite obvious that the separate functioning of mental and physical activity as isolated spheres of the application of human energy could not cease at once. Society put an end to their former antithesis in a revolutionary manner and did much to surmount the given isolation. But at socialism's early phases the distance between

labour by brain and by hand was still much too great, as indeed was the distance between administrative and executive activity. To some extent labour still promoted nothing more than the one-sided development of the individual. Labour morality could not firmly assert itself, and the sense of being the master, social activity and relations of co-operation and mutual assistance did not have full scope for development. There were only limited resources for involving the working people in controlling production and extra-production activity on a broad scale.

On the other hand, the planned organisation of social production was initially directed not so much towards ensuring the prosperity and free development of the members of society as towards the satisfaction of immediate needs: at that phase socialism was, as a rule, unable to balance the expansion of production and consumption. This was due to the prolonged backwardness of agriculture, the relatively low development level of the services industry, and the considerable difference in the living standards of the various social groups. The harmonious combination of personal, collective and social interests was still a difficult task.

It must be specially emphasised that at socialism's early phase the contradictions in society were settled chiefly by political means. With the highly centralised economic management was linked the predominance of extra-moral, political and administrative methods of regulating people's behaviour and of influencing social and economic processes. The generation of people educated in an atmosphere of proprietorship and individualism was still numerous, and this made the problem of surmounting survivals of this atmosphere in people's minds extremely acute. Since at that phase the socialist way of life could not yet be finally established, the orientation on patriarchal practices, traditions and customs remained influential. Survivals were particularly strong in everyday life, which is the most conservative sphere. In addition, there still were anti-socialist forces: the main body of conflicts sprang from the clash of various types of consciousness and of hostile, antagonistic interests and aims.

Society's entire make-up changes, mainly qualitatively, at the phase of mature socialism. Rapid and many-sided

progress is made towards the attainment of a high level of socialisation of industry and labour. The conditions are created for the implementation of the specifically socialist principle of distribution and all advantages in this area of relations are almost entirely abolished. Social and property distinctions between people are no longer (or almost no longer) the outcome of an unequal relation to social ownership of the means of production. On this level inequality is due only to the inequality of direct labour relations and the division of labour stemming from the specific features, character, place and function of its various forms and from the heterogeneity of organisational and managerial relations.

There is a diminishing demand for a "partial", narrow-specialised person, and rather the conditions are created for man's versatile and harmonious development, including the improvement of his professional skills. Arduous manual labour is supplanted on a huge scale by automation and comprehensive mechanisation. The sphere of creativity in industry is enlarged. The supply of electric power per worker increases and labour acquires a growing intellectual content. The number of purely mechanical functions diminishes.

Socialist democracy, including production democracy, develops on an increasingly more solid foundation. The working people take an immeasurably more active and effective part in industrial management. This refers to workers' participation in the movement for improvements in production, in the drawing up of plans, in the discussion of the results of the emulation movement, in the work of scientific and technical societies, in trade union control of the work of the managerial apparatus, in various bureaux set up and operating on a voluntary basis, in foremen's and young specialists' councils, and so forth. This makes the working people increasingly aware of themselves as co-owners and co-managers of the means of production, gives them a larger moral incentive for work, fosters relations of comradely co-operation, mutual assistance and collectivism, and compensates for the certain objective narrowness of technical creativity in industry with social forms of initiatives and creativity.

The conditions of life are further improved in a mature socialist society. The unity of social, collective and personal interests acquires flexibility, stability and strength.

Under mature socialism the drive for efficiency is the strategic orientation and leading tendency in industry. Not only resources as a whole, but also the portion used by society to promote the people's welfare and for carrying out a large spectrum of social tasks, increase substantially. Further, it must be noted that whereas the capitalist world is unable to cope with serious economic difficulties, including difficulties caused by the energy crisis, socialism, which rejects the utopian doctrines of zero growth, industrial asceticism, the cult of compulsory saving and return to the "blissful Middle Ages", is in the main successfully resolving the problem of adequately supplying the economy with key power and raw material resources.

The attainment of social homogeneity is the leading trend of the changes in the social and class structure of a developed socialist society. The cultural, technical and educational level of the workers is rising swiftly.

The eradication of the existing distinctions between town and country is accompanied by the drawing together of the working class and the peasantry. This is being achieved through the industrialisation of agriculture, changes in the character of remuneration for the work of collective farmers, and raising the level of material security and education, and promoting the standard of living. For the type of labour, the educational level, consumer activity and material security workers by brain are drawing close to the working class. The processes leading to the shaping of an integral socialist way of life (despite the distinctions that have still to be surmounted) are moving in the same direction.

The new way of life spells out a dynamic unity of conditions and modes of human activity typical of socialism. It characterises the most essential features of people's labour, association, behaviour, ideology and world outlook. It signifies working, collectivist and truly democratic mode of the existence of man, social groups and society as a whole. It signifies culture that turns man from a submissive cog, a grain of sand carried by social storms, into a creative

subject of the historical process. The socialist way of life is based on social (not private) property, on a planned (not market, chaotic) economy and scientific management of social processes, on a unifying, collectivist (not dividing, individualist) attitude of people to society and each other, on respect (not indifference) for the values produced by labour, on the cultivation of respect for the dignity of the working man, on patriotism and the promotion of progressive national traditions and socialist internationalism (not racialism, chauvinism, nationalism, cosmopolitanism), on the adoption and enrichment of mankind's progressive cultural values (not a parasitical, consumer attitude to them as required by mass culture, and not their eradication as required by counter-culture), on iron-clad social guarantees of freedom, equality, well-being and humanism, on the highest satisfaction with one's life and work which emanates from the revolutionary-critical orientation of the consciousness (not from the complacency of utilitarian-practical adaptation) and from participation in the work of reshaping the world.

#### **REVOLUTIONARY-CRITICAL ORIENTATION OF THE SOCIALIST CONSCIOUSNESS**

The attempts to idealise the results of the revolution, the building of socialism and its development at the present phase, and the depiction of all these difficult and highly complex processes as an undeviating, evolutionary and painless advance towards the ideals of communism are flatly rejected by Marxism-Leninism as scientifically untenable and politically harmful. Actually these were contradictory processes that sometimes developed unevenly, by spurts and zigzags. There were slips in them, disharmony between the rates of negating age-old forms of social life, social order and the discipline of the stick and hunger, and the birth of new forms of social organisation, of conscious discipline and rule by the people. There were imbalances in the shaping of various aspects of the socialist way of life. Development ran into many extremely difficult problems—from the need to divert energy for defence against

encroachments by international imperialism to lack of knowhow of building socialism. The course, rate, depth, soundness and cost of these processes were powerfully influenced by the degradation of morals prior to the revolution, by the fact that the minds of millions of people were infected by proprietary psychology, consumer ideas or nationalism.

By and large, at all the phases of its development, including the mature phase, socialism has not yet entirely freed itself from the economic and moral traditions, habits, traces and birthmarks of capitalism. This is due mainly to the historically limited development level of the productive forces and the extent of the actual socialisation of production and labour.

The existence of commodity-money relations generates the need for controlling the measure of labour and the measure of consumption, for providing the means for individual existence only in exchange for participation (in accordance with legalised norms) in specialised forms of activity, chiefly, of course, in production. From this stems the specifically socialist principle of distribution according to the quantity and quality of work, principally through various wage systems.

This principle ushers in the establishment of socialist equality. On the economic level its formula reads: every member of society must receive as much material goods as he gives society, minus the share compensating for the expended means of production, and used to expand production, set up reserve funds and maintain the social consumption funds. This principle makes it possible to combine social, collective and personal interests. It is a forced instrument that allows avoiding stagnation and destruction in industry, enlisting the masses into the building of socialism and communism, and protecting the interests of society, enterprises and individuals against people inclined to live at someone's expense and give society as little as possible while getting from it as much as possible. When it is necessary to intensify various sectors of the economy or the whole of social life, the socialist principle of distribution makes it possible to manoeuvre with personnel with the purpose of speeding up development, giving greater

incentives for work and flexibly assessing socially useful activity.

Compared with communism, socialism unquestionably asserts a less mature form of equality and justice. In socialist society there still remain differences in wealth and also "unjust differences";\* and a certain inequality in the possibility of realising individual aspirations and in the level of materially reinforcing these aspirations. Also unquestionable is the fact that the operation of the socialist principle of distribution and the existence of money relations do not allow closing all roads to egoistic concentration on one's own advancement, to self-alienation, to a market attitude to oneself, to bare utilitarianism, to relations to other people as competitors, and so forth. But one must have no understanding of Marxism-Leninism at all to say that the socialist principle of distribution according to work, the money form of exchange, the differentiated wage scale and operational economic autonomy are leading to a constant revival of bourgeois individualism. This principle strengthens legal and moral order, while violations of it are the source of evil. For that reason the CPSU is tireless in speaking of the need for improving distribution according to work and combining moral and material incentives.\*\*

Let us note something else. Socialism cannot entirely resolve the problem of alternating forms of labour, of giving many-sided mobility to the functions of workers. The percentage of manual, non-mechanised labour is still high, particularly in agriculture, trade, the services industry and in ancillary work. Labour has not yet become the prime necessity and main interest in life (although major advances have been made in that direction). The attitude that work is non-voluntary, that it is compulsive activity, has not yet been shed by all members of society, and therefore there still are residual transmuted correlations between labour and enjoyment, between work and leisure. Freedom to choose activity that conforms entirely with people's inclinations cannot as yet be fully assured. Not all

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 466.

\*\* See L. I. Brezhnev, *op. cit.*, p. 86.



the citizens of a socialist state can be involved in the administration of social affairs. The individual has not yet become a universal being who has entirely surmounted segmentation, for he cannot embody in his activity the entire wealth of social relations. Remnants of inherited inequality relative to cultural values and of elements of cultural consumption still exist.

We have mentioned the existence of distinctions between labour by brain and by hand, between administrative and executive functions. Hence the objective reasons that in some cases give birth to dissatisfaction with the character of labour (the impossibility of changing forms of activity, the priority growth of the educational level of the labour force as compared with the character of the functions performed by it, the still considerable percentage of jobs requiring monotonous operations, cases where the combination of social, collective and personal interests has been relaxed, and so forth). Cases where the rationalisation of various aspects of vital activity does not coincide with their humanisation have not disappeared. Red tape and formalism have not been weeded out, social boils such as irresponsibility in the fulfilment of social duty, embezzlement, drunkenness, abuse of office for mercenary aims, an anti-humane attitude to people and, lastly, crime as the extreme expression of immorality are still in evidence. The existence of immoral remnants of the past is one of the reasons for the need for a "special apparatus for coercion"\* and various social restrictions.

On the whole, the individual still has the possibility of not linking the satisfaction of his need for a purposeful and happy life with socially useful work, of keeping his happiness apart from such work, of regarding work merely as a means of sustaining life, dictated by external expediency. There still may be cases of people looking for the meaning of life in lighter forms of self-realisation, which allows them to feel the self-authenticity of activity only in private life, in individualistic orientations, in acquisitive interests. A sinister role in preventing this orientation from dying away and sometimes in animating it is played by

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*. Vol. 30, p. 284.

bourgeois propaganda, which uses ideological and psychological methods to eulogise free enterprise, "clean" capitalism, "improved" by state-monopoly regulation and models of "liberalised" socialism, and strives (particularly in view of the expansion and complication of the ideological struggle between the two systems) to provoke discontent, disappointment and animosity among a certain segment of the people in the socialist world and bring to life destructive, demagogic and slanderous criticism. Clinging to every irregularity on the battlefield, it inflates any negative phenomenon in socialist society to global dimensions and on this false basis seeks to consolidate a perverse, distorted world outlook, apathy, philistine grumbling and the moral guidelines of quietism, stoicism and anarcho-asceticism.

But, true to its methodology, nihilistic morality confines itself to a generalised description of the thoughts and outlook of these proponents of the sense of wretchedness. The revolutionary-critical orientation of the socialist consciousness predominant in society and, most important of all, the objective relations between people remain outside its field of vision. It believes that if there are people who, to a certain extent, do not feel at home in the socialist world and consider their work, the social system and its ideology as alien forces and regard other people as rivals and themselves as a market value that must be sold at the highest price, alienation prevails in the reality in which these people live. Nihilistic criticism thus undertakes to judge social life not on the basis of a direct analysis but only by generalising individual illusory reflections.

It refuses to understand that the "higher the level of our society in its development, the more intolerable are the still occurring departures from the socialist rules of morality", that "acquisitiveness, proprietary tendencies, hooliganism, red tape and indifference to one's fellow humans run against the very grain of our system".\* Nihilistic criticism tries not to notice—and this it knows how to do—that an uncompromising struggle is being waged in socialist society against subjectivism, voluntarism, arm-chair

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\* L. I. Brezhnev, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

administration, endless debates, departmental parochialism and other manifestations of red tape that impede the rooting up of elements of the old psychology. This criticism turns a blind eye when it must be seen and assessed that socialist society is systematically giving effect to purposeful steps to bring the administrative apparatus closer to the requirements of the people and enlist the people into participation in the work of the apparatus and to democratise all sectors of administration. While condemning any power, any social control, discipline and ideological influence, it ignores their class essence as something unworthy of attention. For that reason it has no other choice than to declare "absolute" freedom for all, everywhere, always and in everything. This freedom, however, is impossible. For the critics of communism the class nature of freedom remains as enigmatic as the meaning of the struggle between the two main ideologies and world systems, between socialism and capitalism.

Nihilistic criticism identifies the revolutionary orientation of the consciousness with "shattering", with the "spirit of revolt". But what does it want to be shattered? The systems of management, control, law and order and the moral values and standards of socialism that inspire, organise and guide the struggle with everything outworn and stagnant, with evil, and ensure the establishment of new, more humane relations between people? In other words, this criticism proves to be totally unable to understand the revolutionary-critical character of people's activity in the process of resolving the inner contradictions of life in the socialist world. The principal role in this activity is played by the working class, which has been and remains society's principal productive force and occupies the leading position in socialist social relations. Its sense of commitment, political consciousness, selfless labour and courage have been the decisive factors promoting the building of socialism, defeating fascism and helping to assert communist social relations. The working class of the socialist countries retains this role in full in the struggle against imperialism. True to its internationalist duty, it heads the economic, political and ideological struggle for peace, national liberation and the socialist remaking of society on a global scale.

Nihilistic criticism, which covertly endeavours to disarm socialism ideologically, is irritated by precisely this leading role of the working class and the Communist parties heading it in socialist society. It equates the heroic self-awareness of the socialist peoples to the sense of contentedness, drawing from this fabrication the justification for its own anti-socialist orientation.

Needless to say, in socialist society there still are people attracted by the utilitarian-practical orientation. Bourgeois ideologists grossly exaggerate the scale and influence of the views, norms and feelings conforming to this orientation. For instance, they speculatively depict the growth of consumption in socialist society as ringing in the triumph of a consumer counter-revolution in the foreseeable future. Moreover, they charge socialism with a deliberate striving to perpetuate manipulation with these views and feelings. They go to all lengths to drum into their disciples the pernicious belief that in the socialist world the official ideology and morality are lifeless and receive only outward approval, while the actual—mainly consumer—ideology and morality have “silent” support and that society has reconciled itself to this duality because scientific and technological progress has placed it before an inevitable choice of either opening the sluice-gates to the boiling torrent of consumer moods and passions or of keeping them closed and thereby running the risk of losing the social and moral submissiveness of the masses.

What is the actual situation? In socialist society the living standard is rising steadily, high growth rates are maintained in the output of consumer goods, services are being expanded and the quality of goods is being improved. Statistics (during the past 15 years real per capita incomes in the USSR have nearly doubled, while the overall volume of material benefits and services has grown by about 150 per cent) and direct observations indicate that consumption is showing an extensive and, particularly, an intensive growth. On this question socialist society does not adopt a romantic, utopian attitude or propound the ascetic moral of the producer, anathematise this growth or have recourse to organisational, ideological and psychological methods of restricting it.

Marxism-Leninism wages a determined struggle against the ascetic vulgarisation of the socialist ideal, against the primitive-egalitarian and anti-humane ideal of philistine barrack communism, against asceticism with its blind faith that the secret of all social evils and moral vices lies exclusively in the distribution sphere. This ideal covertly displays nothing but envy, a longing to bring everything down to one level, which is part and parcel of the petty-bourgeois proprietary psychology. It demands not the development of the individual and the assimilation of the entire wealth of culture but the "abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilisation, the regression to the *unnatural* simplicity of the *poor* and crude man who has few needs and who has not only failed to go beyond private property, but has not yet even reached it".\*

The individual's development is determined by the wealth of his requirements, while the volume and quality of output depend on the volume and quality of consumption. Communism is the only social system that can provide every person with the necessary material benefits in accordance with his needs and deliver him from the necessity of having to look for the means for individual existence. It thereby opens up unbounded scope for the development of his natural talents. It is then that society will be able to receive from each according to his ability. Consequently, renunciation of enjoyment is not a saving because the possibility for enjoyment is not merely a result of the development of production but a means for the development of man and, therefore, an impulse for the expansion of production, an enhanced capability for production.

As an element of petty-bourgeois ideology and psychology, asceticism comes into conflict not only with communism but also with all the principles of its first phase—socialism. Lenin repeatedly underscored the role of personal material incentive as a factor stimulating the building of socialism. Emphatically rejecting the Leftist demand that shock work should be combined with levelling in consumption, he noted that shock work is a preference, while preference without consumption is nothing, that the

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\* Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol. 3, p. 295.

people can be enlisted into building the new society with the help of the enthusiasm generated by the revolution reinforced by personal interest, by material incentives. Socialism makes no allowance for any negation of the individual, does not sacrifice his interests as something allegedly hostile to the interests of society and the collective. Socialism means not the absorption but the burgeoning of the individual, who in the collective receives everything he needs (and possible at each given phase) for the realisation of his individual talents and capabilities. This is realised not at the expense of the masses in favour of the individual and not at the expense of the individual in favour of the masses. It would be a gross mistake to believe that the rising level of well-being signifies demoralisation, a betrayal of ideals and of the revolutionary spirit.

The growth of the living standard is the highest aim of social production in socialist society, the general orientation of long-term socio-economic development, of its organisation, rates, proportions and directions. This is recorded in the decisions of the 25th Congress of the CPSU.

However, the growth of consumption is by no means the same as the growth of the cult of consumption as a special system of views, regulatory ideas and expectations. In socialist society no group of the population is interested in cultivating the fetishes of consumer morals, in provoking the rapture of the worship of things. First, the planned economy develops without any drugging of the demand (although scientific management of social processes requires a serious study of the laws of consumption and the mechanisms of directing the behaviour of the consumer). Second, on the basis of the enhanced level of labour productivity and the gradual diminution of qualitative distinctions in social labour socialist society is consistently reducing the difference between maximum and minimum remuneration for labour and bringing together group levels of income and, consequently, of consumption (while avoiding any excessive levelling up of the wages of people with different qualifications). This is being accomplished on the basis of social justice, in other words, on the basis of a general growth of the incomes of all groups but with the accent on priority growth for groups whose incomes are

below average. Third, in socialist society ostentatious consumption is not a criterion of the individual's value to society, a means of advancement or a form of competitive struggle. Fourth, qualitative changes are taking place in consumption: the range of requirements linked with the individual's harmonious development (need for creative and highly organised work; morally enriched association and co-operation) is rapidly taking shape.

Although the factor of material incentives is by no means equal to the stimulation of the cult of consumption, the swift evolution of consumption has serious moral drawbacks and negative consequences (consumption for the sake of consumption, repulsive excesses in consumption, a bent for accumulation, and so forth). But for socialism the consumer orientation coincides in large measure with the problem of surmounting negative survivals of the past, of eradicating the conditions that favour their temporary preservation, with the successful elaboration of a spiritual alternative to the cult of consumption. Here a role of no little importance is played by the creation of a system of rational distribution of material goods and an optimal pattern of consumption that could help the individual to adapt himself to new situations in the sphere of consumption. At the 25th Congress of the CPSU Leonid Brezhnev said that it was necessary "that the growth of material opportunities should be constantly accompanied by a growth in our people's ideological, moral and cultural level. Otherwise we may have relapses into the philistine, petty-bourgeois mentality."\*

On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that under whatever pretexts it has tried to graft itself to the new society, to "inscribe" itself into the socialist way of life, the sense of contentedness, which is linked with the cult of consumption, by no means signifies devotion to socialism, to its morals and way of life, as may seem at first glance. This sense is embodied in notions that embellish reality, in the spirit of conservatism, in the striving to leave inviolable the relations, practices, traditions and stereotype views doomed to decay. This philistine, apologetic thinking

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\* L. I. Brezhnev, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

is incompatible with socialist society. It only seems to serve as a means of strengthening collectivist relations, the efficient functioning of production and the managerial, ideological and educational systems. Remaining true to itself, the new society does not by its very nature accept servile contentedness, moral dogmatism, fear of criticism, placidity, complacency, the lulling pseudo-optimistic belief in the philosophy of letting things drift, or the belief that socialism neither faces nor will face difficult and primary socio-economic, moral and political problems. This is clearly stated in all the documents of the 25th Congress of the CPSU. Fear of difficulties, the glossing over and justification of mistakes and the illusory "conception of socialism as something lifeless, rigid, fixed once and for all"\* create a trend towards social immobility and lead to abandonment of the drive to improve reality in accordance with the communist ideal. Communist morals can discharge their functions in resolving the contradictions of social life only in the event they lay bare reality's imperfections and reinforce the striving to remake that reality.

While substantially expanding the sphere of moral regulation and the field of moral freedom, in all its storeys and compartments life in socialist society requires from the individual a higher level of consciousness, dedication to communist ideals, lofty principles, a sense of responsibility for his behaviour, fuller self-realisation and sympathetic attitude. The accent in the regulation of behaviour is shifting gradually from that part of the norms that is of a restrictive character to that which stimulates. As regards the individual, he finds a growing need for a more profound understanding of the social significance of norms, for action motivated by the inner conviction that it is required. He has become more demanding in his moral self-assessment, more discerning in his search for the significance of life and his place in society, broader in his understanding of happiness and higher in his moral level. There is now a more pronounced orientation on a lofty moral ideal, more many-sided than ever before and filled with a rich philosophical content. On this point Leonid Brezhnev noted

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\* V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 25, p. 472.



that "nothing adds so much to the stature of the individual as a constructive attitude to life and a conscious approach to one's duty to society, when matching words and deeds becomes a rule of daily behaviour".\*

Socialism is a social organisation that is constantly renewing itself. It is mobile and develops through a struggle between the new and the old, through the settlement of inner contradictions. In it the consciousness of leaders and the led must be able to detect these contradictions, establish how acute they are, their magnitude, the extent to which they have matured and the possibilities for settling them, regardless of whether contradictions arise as a result of the obsolescence of individual links, elements and forms of the social organisation or of their incompatibility with new requirements and tasks, or as a result of subjective errors or distortions. The socialist consciousness cannot reconcile itself with established but outworn or moribund practices and calls for the earliest possible reorganisation, rectification and improvement and for the assertion of the new. It not only detects contradictions in social development but also helps to resolve them, spurring social energy and charting programmes for collective and individual action.

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\* L. I. Brezhnev, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

## CONCLUSION

As the world revolutionary process and the building of communism advance, the remnants of the old mentality and of the illusory philosophy based on stereotype patterns will be removed. When survivals of social and cultural inequality disappear, when the gap is closed between theory and practice, between labour and beauty and between moral views and the circumstances of life, when the source of social wealth is the appropriation by man of his own productive energy and of the energy of his mind, and labour becomes the principal means of the individual's self-development, even the possibility for ideological prejudices appearing in the mass consciousness will fade away. Elements of the sense of contentedness and the sense of wretchedness, of false optimism and disastrous nihilism, which are historically transient, will recede into the past once and for all.

This scientifically substantiated, unshakable confidence in the communist future, in the triumph of reason and humanity, in the attainment of universal happiness comprises the core of the optimistic philosophy of those who work for, defend and build the future.

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